LIFE
OF
SHISHIR KUMAR GHOSH

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FOUNDER-EDITOR OF AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA

BY

WAYFARER

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"Such a man is rare to find You have his life written; and from it you may know the story of his life and properly value the man who had made journalism what it is in India"

Bal Gangadhar Tilak presiding over Shishir Kumar's sixth death anniversary on the 29th December 1917

CONTENTS

		PAGE
INTRODUCTION		i
CHAPTER I	EARLY LIFE AND INBORN PATRIOTISM	1
„ II	INDIGO CULTIVATION AND PLANTER PERSECUTION — BIRTH OF PATRIKA	18
„ III	MIGRATION TO THE METROPOLIS	30
„ IV	IN THE THICK OF BATTLES	60
„ V	MONOGRAPHS	86
„ VI	EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN	92
„ VII	THE SEEDS SPROUT	101
„ VIII	BROADCASTING BHAKTI-SEEDS	112
„ IX	A VOTIVE OFFERING; — AMIYA NIMAI CHARIT	121
„ X	IN DREAMLANDS; — KALACHAND-GITA	152
„ XI	AT THE FEET OF HIS LORD	159
APPENDICES		
I	TRIBUTES	165
II	FACSIMILE OF LETTERS IN SHISHIR KUMAR'S HANDWRITING	183
III	REPERTORY TO "IN QUEST OF BLISS"	191
IV	GENEALOGY OF GHOSH FAMILY	195

INTRODUCTION

The task of writing a biographical sketch of Shishir* Kumar, one of the greatest sons of India, should have devolved on abler hands The writer did not feel equal to it But the direction came from his nephew, Sj Mrinal Kanti Ghosh, *Bhakti bhushan* — son of Hemanta Kumar Ghosh, the next elder brother of Shishir Kumar,— now in his eighty sixth year, and it could not be disregarded To him his uncle was his Guru and his guide, in the same way as his father had been to his uncle He felt anxious to repay his debt to his preceptor, if also to leave the legacy of his uncle's example for the good of those who wished to profit by it He felt also that after he had passed away, there would be none left in the family circle to furnish the materials for a work of this nature which were at present either stored in his memory or scattered over the mildewed files of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* or were to be found in sketchy or fragmentary form in published or unpublished records

In the words of G K Gokhale, Shishir Kumar was "a wonderfully interesting and inspiring personality" Born and bred in an obscure Bengal village without pretensions to high university education, placed in rather straitened circumstances, with hardly a helpmate except his brothers and sisters, he is an illustration of what a man even with such disadvantages can accomplish by dint of sheer perseverance, backed by faith He aroused in the masses a consciousness of their thraldom and helped to build up the spirit of nationalism with which the country pulsates today Above all else, he sought, in his later years, to give a new outlook to life, by popularizing the Religion of Love preached by Sri Chaitanya Deva There was a strange combination in him of this doctrine of love and the fire of patriotism, the beneficent influence of the one reacting on the other and lending life and colour to all his activities His fearlessness† in all fields of action came from

* We have spelt his name as he used to do it

† Mahatma Gandhi addressed the prayer gathering on Thursday (29th August 1946) evening on the necessity of driving out all fear from their heart As he listened to the *bhajan* he said he was thinking that it was not only for sweet singing that seers and singers of old addressed God but as One who drove out fear from their heart and as their only true friend in distress — A P I in *Hindusthan Times* of New Delhi of the 31st August 1946

a faith in his God and in his mission, and his courage from his integrity He did not believe in clap-trap and shunned the limelight of publicity. When he emerged from the obscurity of his village and came into the metropolis of India (then Calcutta), notable men from far and near were soon drawn to him for counsel or consultation on momentous questions of the day All who came in contact with him were struck at once by the forceful character of the man, frail of frame, ill clad, unkempt, squatting on a reed mat, with penetrating eyes and withal a beaming countenance which spoke of love and goodwill and a humour which was his own It is difficult to give a clear picture of this uncommon man who passed away over thirty five years ago, sufficient for outlines of faces being blurred and memories of a man's qualities being buried with his bones

After we had written thus far, we were struck by what Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan came to say in unveiling the bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Karachi on the 14th September, 1946 "In a recent book, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, Arthur Koestler observes that the future of European civilization depends on the refashioning of the human mind 'Neither the saint nor the revolutionary can save us,—only a synthesis of the two' We have such a synthesis in Gandhi, who is at once a saint and a revolutionary His saintliness has little in common with sectarian orthodoxy" As stated elsewhere, A J F Blair, the then Editor of *The Empire*, speaking at the memorial meeting of Shishir Kumar held in the Town Hall of Calcutta on March 23, 1911, had said "Every country has its saints and warriors but as a rule the saints are not warriors and the warriors are not saints It was part of the greatness of Shishir Kumar Ghosh that he combined in his own personality those apparently irreconcilable elements" It is not in a spirit of comparison we refer to the above two observations, the one coming thirty-five years after the other, but we point out to the strange similarity in the character of two individual politicians as found in its analysis by two different critics, one an Englishman and political observer and the other a world famed Indian philosopher speaking nearly four decades after his forerunner on the same theme And these years in the first half of the twentieth century have made all the difference in world conditions and politics, making of all countries one world and of all nations one race,—the whole humankind, when a 'saint-revolutionary' was indeed required to arise in the stately stature of Gandhiji

In the pages which follow, the reader will come across many domestic or other incidents of an apparently trivial nature which may not interest him But it would be, in the writer's opinion, an incomplete and imperfect picture of Shishir Kumar, if the human element in him and his character as a man in all its bearings did not find their fullest expression In the words of Archbishop Whately, "the most ordinary and unimportant actions of a man's life will

often show more of his natural character and his habits than more important actions which are done *deliberately* and sometimes against his natural inclinations". Similarly, in the latter part of this book, the writer has gone into '*Gouranga–leela*", as delineated by Shishir Kumar, at a little greater length perhaps than might ordinarily find place in a biography But can we picture Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva and understand him fully without the background of Dakhineswar and a description of the many sports and manifestations of his divine mother? Can Buddha's life be properly appreciated without an account of the evil spirits which hovered round him? The life of Shishir Kumar could not be correctly portrayed torn from his physical and spiritual settings He lived in Sri Gouranga's *leelas* and an account of them should not be out of place if only to know what he had built his faith upon Was it a vain shadow he had pursued through life or was his faith grounded on the much prized rock of reasonings? If the first, then he was as much a victim of delusion as were far greater men than he, — Basudeva Sarbabhouma, Prakashananda Saraswati and a host of others, including the Paramhansa Deva of recent memory whom his *Tantric* preceptor, the Bhairavi, regarded as an incarnation of Sri Gouranga *

In writing this book, the author has derived much help from the *Life of Shishir Kumar Ghosh* (in Bengali) by the late Anath Nath Bose and from *History of Political Thoughts* published by the University of Calcutta He is confident the reader will find in the life of Shishir Kumar, who affected the mind of his generation not in one way but in various directions much to interest and enlighten him

October 1946 AUTHOR

* *Vide* p 504 of Vol II of *The Cultural Heritage of India* published by Sri Ramkrishna Centenary Committee Belur Math Calcutta

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE AND INBORN PATRIOTISM

SHISHIR KUMAR GHOSH was an extraordinary person, singular in many ways and surprising Born a patriot and philanthropist, he grew into an astute politician and a severely independent journalist whom Bal Gangadhar Tilak acknowledged as his "political guru", and to quote his own words, "revered him as a father, from whom he had learnt many lessons sitting at his feet" * His counsels were sought by Provincial Governors in days when the subject people lived in complete ignorance of their inherent rights and when a personal contact with satraps and "civilians" (then mostly Europeans) was considered even by princes as an event of their life Shishir Kumar knew no fear The awe which the ruling race inspired amongst Indians in the sixties and seventies of the last century found no place in him He was endowed with a courage and a spirit of independence which astonished his countrymen and won for him the esteem and admiration of large hearted statesmen in England, on the one hand, and the wrath and odium of the bureaucratic rulers in India and the Anglo-Indian press generally, on the other With a skeleton of a frame in which the bones stuck out of the skin, he yet possessed a strength and powers of endurance belied by his exterior Even from his early boyhood, there was in him a strong and sincere faith in God and in His goodness which inspired him in all spheres of action and never deserted him in times of trouble He lived a very simple life and, lost in his thoughts, he would often wear his shirt inside out or with its buttons at the back He believed in a life after death, in a better world, where we meet our departed dear ones again, and never lived in fear of death As a spiritualist, he received messages from the other world In the years of his retirement he gave a new life to Vaishnavism and in a sense resurrected Sri Chaitanya Deva of Navadweep and his *Nāma Sankirtan* He was a musician of an outstanding order, and the morning and evening worship of the family deity was

* *Vide* Appendix

conducted with *Kirtan* songs to the accompaniment of *Khol and Karatâl* (drum and cymbals) which could be heard in the outer apartments by visitors waiting there to discuss the burning political problems of the day And often he would come out and meet them with eyes still moist and forthwith plunge into intricate questions affecting the welfare of the country Mr G K Gokhale, speaking at the memorial meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall on March 23, 1911, spoke with an intimate knowledge of the inner man in Shishir Kumar when he said that 'in the midst of the din and turmoil of practical life, he could when he chose withdraw himself into an inner sanctuary to be alone with his Maker' And during the last ten or fifteen years of his strenuous life he lived more in that sanctuary than in the outer world, — ever at the feet of his Lord, Sri Gouranga, surrendering himself unto Him completely with the same faith and fervour which had guided and governed him in his political life It was during these later years that he accomplished the crowning work of his spiritual life and wrote his memorable books on Vaishnavism These included the *Amiya Nimai Charit* in six volumes, consisting of over two thousand pages, and its English counterpart, *Lord Gouranga*, and *Kalachand Gita*, — the last a highly philosophical and devotional book, considered by many as ranking next to the *Bhagaval Gita* Of *Lord Gouranga*, an Englishman, Mr A J F Blair, the then Editor of the *Empire*, said at the same memorial meeting "It was in that wonderful book *Lord Gouranga* that I obtained my first startled glimpse into the spiritual depths of the Hindu mind From the moment of that revelation, I came to regard its author in the light of a spiritual guru, and although many years intervened between my introduction to the book and my introduction to the man, when I did meet him in the flesh and fell under the charm of his personality, I felt that here was a teacher whom I had known intimately ever since I came to these shores'

Shishir Kumar was born in the year 1840 His life sketch will lose half its interest and value if we did not know the customs and traditions prevailing in rural Bengal those early days, and the domestic conditions in which he saw the light of day and received his sustenance until he had reached his manhood His ancestral home was a small hamlet in the District of Jessore, known as Joidia in the neighbourhood of a better known village Kotchandpur His great great-grandfather, Ram Ram Ghosh, had married in a family in Palua Magura (since known as Amrita Bazar) and shifted his residence to the latter place He was not in sufficiently affluent circumstances to refuse the help and patronage which his father in law's house extended to him It was during the time of his grandson, Padma

Lochan Ghosh (grandfather of Shishir Kumar), that the financial condition of the family showed some improvement It was, however, not Padma Lochan but his son, Hari Narayan Ghosh who brought this about during the lifetime of his father, so that old Padma Lochan, though he had struggled hard to secure bare subsistence for himself and his family even from his sixteenth year, died in prosperity Though poor, Padma Lochan was too proud to suffer any humiliation at the hands of his richer relations who extended their help to him For a time after his marriage, he lived at his father in law's place in Salkhia with his wife and children In the course of an altercation between him and some members of that family, he felt slighted He left the house straightway with his first two sons, Hari Narayan, then about eight years old, and Deva Narayan, five years, and took the road to Palua-Magura, his wife staying back with other children He carried the two boys alternately on his shoulders In the middle of the day, he rested under a roadside tree with his two little burdens placed on the ground But he was carrying a much heavier load The means of living at Palua-Magura and bringing up the boys were practically nothing He was oppressed by a picture of starvation not so much for himself as for his two little ones He cried in his distress, tears trickling down his face Hari Narayan noticed it and asked "Why are you crying, father?" At this affectionate enquiry, his heart nearly broke and taking Hari Narayan to his bosom and crying all the more, put it to the boy. "Will you remove the cause of my distress if you knew it?" The answer came from the little son "Yes, I shall remove the cause of all your sorrows" And this undertaking given under a roadside tree by the 8-year old boy, the future father of Shishir Kumar, was more than fulfilled There was no wish of Padma Lochan which the son had failed to gratify Even the most important and costly festival of Durga Puja was celebrated by Padma Lochan with great pomp and feeding of the poor Intensely religious, he spent the greater part of his time in worship and prayers Along with the secular education he gave his sons, he instilled into them early in their life the spirit of devotion and a faith in God which Hari Narayan in a special measure made *his own and which had their fullest fruition in his grandsons*

In those early days, English education was not much in vogue The court language was Persian Hari Narayan came to be a profound Persian and Arabic scholar and knew very little of the English language At the age of seventeen his education, so far as it could be given him, was finished and he was driven to drudge for bread He got the appointment of a copyist in the Jessore District Judge's Court Pleased with his efficiency, the Judge soon promoted him to the sheristadarship of the Subordinate Judge's Court

He did not stick to it long He studied law and became a practising lawyer in the Jessore courts and was for a time made an officiating Munsif He might have risen in the Judicial Service to be a Subordinate Judge, if he had not found the independent legal profession more to his taste Before long he rose to be one of the foremost lawyers of the Jessore Bar He earned a considerable income and spent lavishly in helping the poor and the needy, in establishing charitable institutions like hospitals, free schools and the like, in educating his children and towards religious objects with the result that he could leave no legacy for Shishir Kumar and his brothers, except some small landed property and the residential house in Palua Magura which he had built He had a charming voice and came to be known as one of the best musicians of his time And this musical talent descended to his sons and grandsons The house in which the latter lived in Calcutta in later years always throbbed with music The little grandsons would pick up the tunes their elders sang and would move about the house humming their favourite air

The qualities of this great father, Hari Narayan, are best described by Shishir Kumar in the dedication of his book, *Narottam Charit*: "Father, when we were young, people said that there was not another like you for qualities of the head and heart or for sweetness of temper or for good looks and winning manners and that we could not come anywhere near you in your greatness How could we be anything like you, father? You were born a pet child of God who enriched you with such gifts It is not our fault if we be not like you We were too young to fathom the depth of your knowledge and wisdom But we came to know something of what your heart was like Seeing people in distress, you shed tears, and not until you had given them some relief did you have your peace of mind When you sat down to worship your God, tears bathed your face which drew sympathetic tears from the eyes of the spectators I have heard the finest music from the best musicians, but none such as yours, nor do I hope to"

If such was Hari Narayan, father of Shishir Kumar, the mother was regarded as a 'ministering angel' by all She died many years ago but lives to this day on the lips of thousands For, her name was Amritamoyee, literally, 'full of nectar', and the now famous *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was named after her by her worthy sons out of their love and devotion to her In the name of that journal, hers is perpetuated "What is in a name?' — the poet had expostulated Is there nothing in it? Padma Lochan had left five sons, Hari Narayan, Deva Narayan, Ganga Narayan, Chandra Narayan and Krishna Narayan Not only was the second part of each name 'Narayan' or

God, but the first part of each was also Divinity in some form or other. The Hindu has believed in utilizing every opportunity for pronouncing God's name

When Amritamoyee was married to Hari Narayan, his age was nine years and hers only two and a half This baby bride lived upto the seventy-second year of her life in fairly good health after having brought into this world no less than fifteen children, of whom nine were sons During her lifetime, she had the hard domestic duties of a large household which she performed with clockwork precision and care The kitchen was her exclusive domain and she herself did the cooking for all who had to be fed morning and evening, numbering over fifty, sometimes a hundred, including servants, adherents and guests The institution of paid cooks had then no place in the village community Ladies took a special pride in being first class cooks Some of them were noted as ranking topmost in the culinary art and they were in requisition wherever there was a ceremonial feast It was a matter of pride and pleasure with them to officiate at such places and having taken charge of the cooking department, turn out sumptuous dishes for hundreds of people The feasts over, the guests departed with betels in their mouth and loud 'certificates of merit' in regard to the cuisine The number of courses on such occasions was commonly no less than thirty or forty, consisting of all kinds of vegetables and fishes and delicacies of milk and sweets This was then, and today, cooking is considered to be a terror and a bugbear, or the housewife is a dyspeptic, thriving on barley water and patent medicines, and joint family system having practically disappeared, if there is not a second lady in the house, the office-going husband is often compelled to go to the nearest hotel to get his plate of rice and curry! Reflecting on the past and the present, one is inclined to apostrophize with Goldsmith

> O luxury! thou curst by Heaven's decree,
> How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!
> How do thy potions, with insidious joy,
> Diffuse their pleasure only to destroy!
> * * *
> Even now the devastation is begun,
> And half the business of destruction done

If Amritamoyee was a devoted and hardworking housewife, she was a most compassionate lady whose heart went beyond her own household out into the little world of her village, where she was ever by the side of the sick and sorrowing, offering her ministrations in the form of physical aids or spiritual discourses She was, above all, a most pious woman with unflinching

faith in God and in His goodness and never complained to her Maker even in her deepest sorrow And this religious trait in her was the richest treasure Shishir Kumar and his brothers inherited, richer far to them than the legacy of a kingdom The sons worshipped the mother as a goddess on earth

Hari Narayan died at the comparatively early age of fifty-four Out of his nine sons, only four survived him, Hemanta Kumar the second, Shishir Kumar the third, Motilal the fourth and Golap Lal the eighth, the other five, Basanta Kumar the eldest Sarat Kumar a twin of Hemanta Kumar, Hira Lal the fifth, Ram Lal the sixth, and Benodi Lal the seventh having passed away during their father's lifetime Sarat Kumar had come to a tragic end at the age of two, having been given, through sheer inadvertence, a poisonous drug to counteract the effects of scratches from a pup Basanta Kumar too died at the early age of thirty Shishir Kumar was then about twenty-six Basanta Kumar was a genius and by reason of his qualities was adored by his younger brothers and sisters as their sole and undisputed guru and guide Basanta Kumar and Shishir Kumar, being temperamentally very much alike, were attached to each other, and the former was the making of the latter A study of Shishir Kumar's life needs an introduction to his maker In dedicating the second volume of *Amiya Nimai Charit* to his brother, Shishir Kumar says

"Far from the bustle and noise of a city life, we brothers and sisters lived in a small hamlet then unknown and obscure We had little time or opportunity of knowing what was going on outside our little world Whatever knowledge we got was earned in our own little family circle I was then thirteen and my *dada* eighteen years old One day he happened to tell me casually 'To be able to believe in God's incarnation is a matter of great good fortune If I can ever come to believe in it, I shall be at the feet of Gouranga of Nadia' I asked him 'Who was he?' 'Have you not heard', he answered, 'that as Jesus Christ is to the Christians, so is Nimai of Nadia to us Hindus? Both were so much alike' 'It is a great good fortune, you said, to believe in an *Avatar* What is the significance of it?' I asked him 'Do you know, Shishir,' he replied, 'the cause of our sorrows and tears? We feel as if we had no father nor mother to look after us and were mere waifs wandering about in the world homeless and unclaimed We shout for God but do not know if He hears us or not If we knew that He heard us, our sorrows would be less And if we knew further that He not only heard us but had also great love for us, our sorrows will be gone altogether Incarnation or *Avatar* means that either God comes down Himself in human guise or sends one of His chosen few

as an Apostle So, as soon as you believe in His incarnation, you come to believe that He is one of our own, who naturally feels for our sorrows One who imbibes this faith has no sorrows at all or he scoffs at them'

"It may be questioned how my brother, then only eighteen years old, could speak on such lofty subjects What can I say of him? He had mastered the English language at home, learnt Sanskrit and Persian, finished mathematics taken to physics and chemistry and was learning French to help him in his study of chemistry His talents were extra ordinary He could multiply, ten digits by ten digits without putting them on paper and I used to look up to him as my God on earth For him I could sacrifice myself a hundred times over He shaped and made me as the potter moulds his pots and he moulded me well But he left me floating in the sea of this *Samsâra*, too early in my life, inexperienced and immature, and I was carried into the whirlpool of politics which was the undoing of me It is now many long years since we parted in this world But even now, when I sit down for divine meditation, my brother s vision appears in my mind before I concentrate on my God'

Such was the maker of Shishir Kumar the founder-editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, an organ hated and dreaded by the bureaucracy and greeted by the rising generation as a powerful national organ and the redeemer of Bengal Vaishnavism It is interesting to note that at the moment this saint-politician was ushered into the world a bevy of ladies veiled and half-veiled, had stepped into Hari Narayan's courtyard blowing their conch shells accompanied by the beat of a drum and joyously acclaiming *Ulu Ulu* (the propitious cry of Bengali women on festive occasions) to perform the ceremony of *Jalshoi* or *Jalsâdhâ** as a part of marriage rituals, for that evening, the son of a neighbour was going to be married Remembering that when Chaitanya Deva was born, there was an eclipse of the moon and according to custom conch shells were blown and *Kirtan* parties had gone out singing *Harinam* Hari Narayan said that if it pleased God to spare this boy, he would come to be one of the greatest men of his age Apart from this, there was special rejoicing at his birth, as it brought consolation to the two-year old Hemanta Kumar, who had, since losing his twin brother Sarat Kumar three months before, been languishing and had lost his taste for food and play The newborn baby brother once more brought the smile to his face and he

* Ceremony preceding a marriage in which a number of ladies collect a little water from each of the neighbours to fill some pots

this proposition was conveyed to his father he felt astonished and uncle Chandra Narayan gave a sharp rebuke So Shishir has been neglecting his studies and trying to be a musician There is little hope for him To satisfy the curiosity of the father and his friends Shishir was called in and asked to play He took up the *sitar* and played the same tune on it with the skill of an expert rendering the defective part several times in correct fashion Later in life he came to be recognized as a master performer on the *sitar* the violin the *pakhwaj mridang* and other instruments This talent came into special prominence in his after life when he was engaged on *Kirtan* songs and other devotional music

Both he and Basanta Kumar felt that no education was complete without a mastery of science and mathematics which trained the mind to be precise and draw correct inferences They held that whatever one's field of activity this mental training was essential for one's success in that particular sphere This scientific and mathematical bend in Shishir Kumar greatly helped him to be a keen observer of men and measures and in reinforcing his vigorous criticisms against the bureaucrats with a deadly logic which the latter found unanswerable

The spread of English education and contact with Western civilization and culture in the middle of the last century brought about a change of ideas amongst the educated people in general many of whom came under the influence of foreign missionaries and embraced Christianity Others came under the banner of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's newly founded Brahmo Samaj and became Brahmos Shishir Kumar and his brothers did not escape being influenced by the latter movement and they became Brahmos It gave their father Hari Narayan a pious Hindu his life's shock One day entering a Hindu temple with his three sons Basanta Hemanta and Shishir he asked them to pay their homage to the deity This they most respectfully refused to do and implored their father not to interfere with their religious belief After this incident father and sons never discussed religion While there were many who did not dare leave the Hindu fold for fear of social ostracism Shishir Kumar and his brothers openly severed their connection with Hindu society which in its turn excommunicated them

This social boycott did not damp their spirit The brothers and sisters banded themselves into a society of their own Morning and evening they assembled in a common room and said the prayers of their new creed Though rebels against idolatry their mother still continued to be worshipped

as their living idol She sat surrounded by her children who sang in a chorus with tears in their eyes

What is his grief
Whose mother is all bliss?
Why then sinners and penitent ye,
And those bereaved,
In ignorance cry,—
' O mother! where art thou?'
Behold the mother seated in our midst
By her children encircled,
Full of love and in tears of affection
Laving us all
Our sins and sorrows washed,—
Behold the rising tide of bliss and joy!
Dance around her, ye children of hers
With upraised arms,
Crying, "Mother, O our mother

This song, even now sung in the Brahmo Samaj, was composed by Shishir Kumar

If Hindu society had ostracized them, they bore no malice against it or its leaders On the other hand they made it their creed to win over by love those who had antagonized themselves and to render service to all without any discrimination They organized a Society of Brotherhood' whose functions were the spreading of literacy amongst the masses, rendering medical aid to poor villagers offering succour to the distressed and bringing comforts to their door Epidemic diseases such as cholera smallpox, etc were common in the villages The people affected were helpless The Ghosh brothers always kept themselves ready to come to the bedside of the sick and nurse them through nights regardless of the patients caste or creed

One afternoon, Shishir Kumar was going to Jessore with Basanta The road lay through lonely and uninhabited tracts At one place towards evening, they heard some jackals squabbling with one another at the foot of a tree The noise was such as is often made on funeral grounds by beasts over a feast of carrion The brothers stopped Shishir Kumar, more inquisitive than Basanta approached the tree The jackals fled and he saw a man, lying apparently dead, from whom came the wail "Give me water, whoever you be, whatever be your caste I was on my way to Jessore but, seized by cholera, was unable to proceed I laid myself here I am dying of thirst' Basanta joined his brother Shishir went to a

nearby tank, brought some water and gave the man a drink The man revived a little and appealed to them "Can you help me in any way? When you will go away, the jackals will return and tear me to pieces" Shishir said "Don't you worry, we shall carry you along with us" "But how?" asked Basanta "I shall carry him on my shoulders if you help me now and then," replied the younger The brothers carried the sick man to Jessore, regardless of infection from the stools of the cholera patient which soiled their clothes and their body The man recovered under their nursing in Jessore

Here is another instance of their spirit of service The servant of a neighbour of their village was seized by cholera The master of the house expelled him from his house and the poor man took shelter under a roadside tree The news reached Shishir and his brother They went to the sick man s help but in spite of all their nursing the man did not come round When about to expire, the man beseeched them to see that his funeral rites as a Hindu were duly performed The brothers carried him on their shoulders to the funeral grounds and had his last rites properly done As he was a low caste man, this act lowered the Ghosh brothers further in the estimation of their villagers But the brothers remained unmoved as true members of the 'Society of Brotherhood' This spirit of *sevā* or service was the soil on which Shishir Kumar s burning patriotism came to flourish

Early in his life, the truth had taken deep root in Shishir Kumar that the first essential for the uplift of the country was a greater spread of education amongst the middle classes Through the untiring perseverance of the Brotherhood, a Higher Class English School was established in the village, suitable arrangements made for the education of grown up women amidst their domestic duties and night schools were started for the peasantry A charitable outdoor hospital was opened where indoor patients were also sometimes admitted A bazar was established in the village where all necessaries of life were to be obtained without having to go to the town of Jessore This bazar was named 'Amrita Bazar' after their mother from which was evolved the name of the village itself and later of the journal *Amrita Bazar Patrika* Very soon the attention of the then District Magistrate of Jessore, Mr Munro, was attracted to the fast developing village of Palua Magura or Amrita Bazar, and he came to inspect it on Shishir Kumar's invitation and was struck by the new life infused into it and the progress made in all directions He commented very favourably on the work done by this little band of young men and secured financial aid for the schools and the hospital At the same time, Shishir Kumar was no less alive to the

importance of physical education He organized gymnasiums and revived wrestling, fencing, lathi play and other indigenous sports

Here is a remarkable illustration of Shishir Kumar's anxiety to alleviate human sufferings One day he came across a case of snake-bite The man was writhing in pain and in a few moments he died Only two or three hours before, he was working in his fields His relations who had gathered round him raised their wails to the skies The man was the head of a small family of the cultivator class, and he left behind him a young widow with a number of hungry little mouths The scene shot an arrow through Shishir Kumar's heart "Was there no remedy", he grieved, "against this scourge from which thousands died each year in this country, especially in this village?' The conviction was born in him in his early years that God who was the Maker of man could not be cruel to the object of His creation, and that He who had created sorrows and afflictions had surely also created means to assuage them Shishir Kumar was sure that a country which abounded in deadly snakes held also the antidote to their poison He engaged a *Mãl Vaidya* (class of snake doctors now nearly extinct) on monthly wages and elicited from him after a good deal of persuasion the secret of snake-bite cure which his class had monopolized He embodied his knowledge in an English brochure *Snake bites and Their Cure* which was translated into more than one vernacular language of India In the year 1871, there was a devastating flood in the Subdivision of Bangaon (District Jessore), submerging villages and filling up wide stretches of *jheels* and other marshy lands One of these was the *jheel* of Chaital Accompanied by a Police Sub-Inspector of that area and three *Mal-Vaidyas*, he proceeded there in a boat to see the snakes, which, he was told were to be found there in thousands during this flood, either in the water or on tops of trees The following description of his thrilling experiences is culled from his treatise on snake bites

> "We saw a sight which has been the good fortune of a few people to witness The sight we saw will never fade from my memory We soon organized an expedition We took three *mâls* The Sub Inspector of Police, a strong man, took his double barrelled gun We entered the boat at about 11 in the morning It was a small boat and was rowed by two men The current was favourable, and the boat ran like a dog in pursuit of a jackal We had not to follow the course of a canal or a river, for we were on a vast sheet of water It would have looked like a sea, but for the trees and huts which yet showed their heads above water The flood was then at its highest, and the people in great distress We took the straight course over huts and trees, and in this manner we crossed the village

of Gopalnagar We then entered an open space and saw in the dim horizon the marsh of Chaital our destination The place was recognized by the presence of a couple of tall palm trees We rowed all of us and though the tiny boat swung to and fro by our vigorous efforts at rowing, we had not much to fear For by a pole we kept measuring the water all the way, and though it was deep here and there generally our passage lay over shallow water And at last we entered the *beel* (marsh) of Chaital It is a low land and paddy is grown there but here and there were high spots where there were trees This big field has a diameter of say six miles It is all plain land with the exception of a few trees which showed their heads above water On the first tree on our way we saw only a few snakes and an iguana But the *mâls* told us that the grand scene was yet before us We saw on that vast sheet of water a couple of palm trees a few date trees and a banian tree The heads of the palm trees were about thirty feet above water, the banian tree covered a large space of land and the date trees only showed their leaves The palm trees were examined by us first We saw that the snakes had coiled round the trunk of these trees from the bottom to the top There was no empty space visible on trunks At the bottom we saw a few *krails*, and we saw there a black one which was the biggest we had ever seen But though we saw a few *krails* and a few black snakes here and there, all the others were only *keutâs* There was not a cobra there, nor any *hamadryad* The snakes not only coiled round the trees but were found to have coiled one above the other It was thus all black from bottom to top The branches which are thorny in palm trees had been avoided, but the leaves had given space to as many as they could hold We did not disturb them in their position of rest on the palm trees From there we proceeded to the date trees All the leaves were covered by the snakes The three *mâls* stood up to catch them The rower who was in the front was pushed behind and one of the *mâls* took his oar He rowed vigorously and caught a branch of the date As soon as he caught the branch thousands of *keutâs* fell from it into the water The fellow not only caught the branch but pulled it, and the head of our small boat was thus made to penetrate through the branches It was then a truly exciting scene Hundreds and thousands of snakes began to let themselves drop from the branches in the water and our boat was soon surrounded by thousands of swimming *keutâs* The Police Officer shrieked in anger and terror Let go the boat you *hârâmjâdâs* cried he, "they will soon fill our boat" But I was enthralled by the scene and had not the power of feeling any terror The *mâls* were engrossed with the work before them and they had no ear to listen to the commands of the officer All the three were engaged in catching snakes and were not at all disposed to remove the boat from the position which it had been forced to take In a second or two, the swimming snakes invaded our boat Of course it was not their object to bite or swallow us but they found a floating substance in our boat and they wanted to make it a resting

place The officer was standing with his gun in his hand, and I told him to leave it and take the pole to protect the boat from the snakes So he and I took a pole each, and so did each of the boatmen The snakes swam all around us with only their heads above water They appeared like a shoal of fish We began to splash all round our boat with the poles, with a view to drive them away But their number was too many for us A good many yet touched our boat in spite of the beating of the water They tried to climb the boat, but they could not They could not raise their heads much above water and it is altogether doubtful, whether even left to themselves, they could climb the boat But surely they were not given much time to make the effort The boat was small, we were standing and beating the water with our poles, the *mâls* were catching snakes, and all these made the tiny thing reel like a drunken *mehtar*, and prevented the snakes to gain a hold of the boat But greater danger was ahead of us The head of the boat had penetrated the dense branches of the date tree, and the *mâls* were catching snakes They were not catching the reptiles at random, but selecting the biggest A *keutâ* is a creature which is rarely met with A *mâl* will purchase one from a comrade for more than rupees ten But here they had such a large number to select from, that they avoided the smaller ones and thought only of catching the biggest which they could reach Now, their attempt to catch the biggest created more than one serious danger for us If a big snake, which they had fixed their eyes upon to catch, was not accessible, they dragged the boat deeper, and this took our tiny vessel almost into the bosom of the branches of the date tree Just bear in mind that all these branches had *keutâs* upon them, each containing hundreds and more The *mâls* were catching snakes, the branches of the trees covered the boat partially, but covered the *mâls* completely *Keutâs* hung over their heads and licked their foreheads Snakes came in contact with their ears, arms and backs But the *mâls* cared not When the boat came in contact with the branches, we raised an alarm For, there was nothing to prevent the snakes creeping over the branches and entering our boat But we forgot our own danger when we saw what the *mâls* had subjected themselves to They were all 'unshaved' *keutâs*, and one touch of their fang and the strongest man would have fallen down dead in five minutes These snakes surrounded the *mâls* Every one of the three *mâls* might have been bitten by one thousand *keutâs* at that moment We forgot our danger, and indeed at that moment none of us the *mâls* included, was in his proper senses I recollect seeing a *keutâ* licking the forehead of a *mâl* and having cried aloud, and given a warning But the warning had not much effect The *mâl* only lowered his head an inch or so, to avoid the contact of the tongue of the *keutâ* One of them muttered, without however stopping in his work 'No fear, Sir, at such times they do not bite' 'But they do bite,' said I, 'during inundations' 'Yes, but if they are hurt', was the laconic reply The *mâls* deceived me with a view to work uninterruptedly The snakes do bite during floods, but on that occasion, the sight produced extraordinary excitement which took away

the senses of the *mâls* When we forgot the danger, it is no wonder that they should Besides they had gone well provided with lancets, and *sone* (hemp) cords Familiarity breeds contempt, and the *mâls* have great contempt for these reptiles On that occasion this contempt was heightened by their large number We too caught the contagion, and forgot temporarily our fear of the snakes, and entered into the pleasures of the exciting work The snakes swam in shoals round our boat but we became indifferent to their presence Those on the date tree had an easy access to our boat, but we gave up the thought of driving them away Every minute the number of swimming snakes was increasing For, hundreds were dropping from the branches of the date trees every second and the heads of the snakes blackened the water all round us The date tree showed no more snakes on that side where our boat was, except a few small ones here and there The *mâls* then wanted to go to the other side of the date tree, but we objected and desired to see the banian tree The boat was turned towards it and we rowed over shoals of snakes They tried to give way to our boat but the crowd was so great, they could not move at their pleasure When we left the date tree, the thought struck us to make a search of the boat to see whether any snake had been able to find its way into it or not It was when we had left the date tree that we felt that we had been in great danger so long The banian tree was quite close and its big trunk was about three feet above water Just above the trunk there were two big branches stretching slantwise in opposite directions Between these two sat a wild cat It was utterly helpless, and was surrounded by *keutâs* on all sides But he lived in peace with them Or rather the snakes lived in peace with him As our boat approached towards the tree, the creature looked at us piteously and the sight excited my pity There was no ferocity of the wild cat in his look But bang went the gun and the cat fell in the water below While I was gazing at the cat, the Sub-Inspector was steadying his aim at it from behind, from the moving boat The cat fell as also a few snakes, shot dead or wounded, for the gun was charged with small shots This exploit of the Police Officer I did not like, as it showed neither any courage nor any delicacy of feeling But the cat was only wounded if wounded at all, for it reached the trunk again though it took a new position which concealed it from our view. We gazed at the tree,—it was a canopy of snakes. The *mâls* wanted to catch more snakes but I opposed They had caught enough, and no snake could be caught from the banian tree without incurring serious danger So we only gazed at the snakes, at their beauty, their variety and their doings. As for their doings, they did nothing They coiled round the branches, sometimes one above the other, and kept quiet and immovable The beauty of their heads surpasses description, but this beauty was only seen when they were moving about or raising themselves up in anger or terror, which they only did when teased by us The variety was so great that it seemed to us that each snake belonged to a separate species One had a yellow hood, the next one a white, and the next a white and reddish, and so

on The colour of the skin also differed in this manner The *keutâs* have no doubt more than a hundred variety

* * *

"I came to Gopalnagar at about 4 p m On the following day I wrote to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, to the Commissioner of the Nadia Division, and to the Magistrate of Nadia to take prompt measures for the destruction of the snakes I wrote to them that at a trifling cost the Government could destroy millions of snakes The Magistrate asked for permission of the Government to do it, and the Government wrote to the Magistrate for report At last it was admitted that my suggestion deserved consideration, and the cost was sanctioned By then, the flood had subsided, and the snakes had entered their holes The *beel* of Chaital is to this day notorious for its *keutâs*"

CHAPTER II

INDIGO CULTIVATION AND PLANTER PERSECUTION—BIRTH OF THE PATRIKA

THE activities of the intrepid brothers soon outgrew the limited sphere of their own and neighbouring villages and they began to cast their eyes on wider fields There was in those days a class of Europeans known as indigo planters who had settled down on the countryside and acquired large landed interests for the cultivation of indigo Their terrorism of the peasantry and numerous acts of oppression to enforce indigo cultivation by peasants on their own terms reached the ears of the Ghosh brothers, and from that time they ranged themselves against the planters These planters lived like nabobs in their palatial bungalows, richly furnished, situate in compounds of fifty acres or more, with orchards abounding in fruits and flowers and extensive lawns for outdoor games At night these bungalows were the rendezvous for dinner parties and balls to which planters living even at long distances congregated and caroused over whisky and champagne Those who had not their wives with them (and many of them had not), not to mention the bachelors, requisitioned village women to add to their pleasures There was no luxury which they denied themselves They owned costly ponies, ten to fifteen each, and horse drawn gigs, popularly known as the bamboo-cart, for their work and recreation, making their roadways even across tenants' fields if they fell on the line of alignment They had their own codes of civil and criminal procedure and of punishments Their word was law The District Magistrates bowed to their power Even the Government flagrantly supported or connived at their misdoings Instances are known of their writing to Magistrates trying their cases with a view to influence their judgement The "My Dear Konstam" case must be within the recollection of the older readers of the *Patrika*

The planter community prospered at the cost of the peasantry who were reduced to serfdom They forced the cultivator to execute a bond to leave uncultivated a part of his holding, the best part, and to grow indigo on it and deliver a stipulated quantity at the end of the season Failure to fulfil the terms of the bond involved the cultivator, together with his future generations, in the obligation to compensate for the alleged loss to the planter, and few were they who were not so involved from father to sons and grandsons Force and allurements were the weapons used to make them execute bonds The planters, clever as they were, managed to secure the services of some of the more influential amongst the cultivators in each village to lure the unsophisticated into the mesh or to terrorize over them An advance of a few rupees per bigha was given to each to fulfil the requirements of law and to bind him down for ever Even this amount often went into the pockets of the office-babus of the planter who enriched themselves by the spoils in various ways and purchased large landed interests and displayed themselves on their elephants Of the contracts imposed on the cultivators, Lord Macaulay wrote in 1835: "But it is said, these contracts are not freely made Force and despotism were employed The peasant assents to disadvantageous terms for fear of the bludgeon-man or is tricked into signing some paper which he does not understand" Of the partisanship of Government and their officials, Sir Ashley Eden, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, deposing before the Indigo Commission, appointed to make enquiries into the oppressions of the planters as a result of country wide agitation, had said " There certainly was failure of justice, which in my opinion, may, to a great extent, be attributed to the strong bias, which the Governor and many of the officers of the Government have always displayed in favour of those engaged in this particular cultivation . . I consider that it has frequently been the case that the Government officials have sacrificed justice to favour the planters I will go further and say that, as a young Assistant, I confess, I have favoured my own countrymen in several instances"

It is significant of the criminal callousness of British rule in India and of the narrow vision of those who were responsible for shaping its policy, that such oppressions were allowed to grow unchecked for fifty years and more before the time when Shishir Kumar caused a banner of revolt to rise against the planters' rule For, we find that even in the year 1814, the first Earl of Minto, as Governor General of India, recorded a Minute from which the following is an excerpt.

> "The attention of Government has recently been attracted in a particular manner to abuses and oppressions, committed by Europeans

who are established as indigo-planters in different parts of the country Numerous as these abuses and oppressions have latterly been, the Right Hon'ble the Governor-General in Council is still willing to hope that this imputation does not attach to the character of indigo-planters generally, considered as a body or class of people The facts, however, which have recently been established against some individuals of that class before the Magistrates and the Supreme Court of Judicature are of so flagrant a nature that the Governor-General in Council considers it an act of indispensable *public duty to* adopt such measures as appear to him, under existing circumstances, best calculated to prevent the repetition of offences, equally injurious to the English character and to the peace and happiness of our native subjects The offences to which the foregoing remarks refer, and which have been established beyond all doubt or dispute against individual indigo planters, may be reduced to the following heads

1st Acts of violence, which although amount not, in the legal sense of the word, to murder, have occasioned the death of natives

2nd The illegal detention of the natives in confinement, especially in stocks, with a view to recovery of balances, alleged to be due from them or for other causes

3rd Assembling in a tumultuary manner the people attached to their respective factories and others, and engaging in violent affrays with other indigo-planters

4th Illicit infliction of punishment by means of a rattan, or otherwise, on the cultivators or other natives"

It was in the year 1858, that Shishir Kumar and his brothers, after going from village to village and acquainting themselves with all details of the planters' tyrannical rule, succeeded in awakening the dying consciousness of the cultivators to their rights and in getting them to combine and resolve against further indigo cultivation, whatever the cost It was far from an easy task to make them take a united stand By intensive propaganda, Shishir Kumar, then only eighteen years old, made them break out, placed himself at their head and gave the lead Shishir Kumar felt he had made a conquest and won a kingdom He came from Jessore and gave the great news to his brothers who, in return, gave him a hearty embrace and their blessing

The planters and their underlings sought to curb the spirit of revolt and to bend *the raiyats to submission* by all manner of oppression, imaginable and unimaginable, but the peasantry had caught the fire which grew in its intensity and was not to be extinguished *Lathiâls* (bludgeon men) were engaged to loot their houses and arson was

a common occurrence But the raiyats had taken a vow not to submit In no time the planters came to know the hand that had lit the fire and was fanning it

In each village the peasants placed a big drum which was beaten on the approach of the danger and villagers all round mustered strong at the place and fought their battles with the hired *goondas* Trumped up cases were brought against them they were harassed by the police and many were sent to jail But they remained firm and solid in their stand their spirit unbroken In dread of the planters the local bar would not defend them in the courts At all stages Shishir Kumar counselled them never to do anything unlawful and to proceed constitutionally in their fight He sent detailed reports to the *Hindu Patriot* of Calcutta then a leading paper edited by Harish Chandra Mukherji who brought the indigo-planters oppression to the notice of the Government in numerous forcibly written articles which also helped to draw public attention to the planters rule and gave rise to a violent agitation against it Rev Long was one of the Christian missionaries who boldly stood by the side of the cultivator and exposed the planters in the popular paper then known as *Harkarâ* (messenger) He was hauled up on a charge of having published an English translation of the famous poet Dinabandhu Mitra s drama *Neel Darpan* (lit indigo as revealed in a mirror) which had been played on the Calcutta stages and afterwards proscribed Rev Long was convicted and fined The disputes between the planters and cultivators and consequent agitation continued vigorously till 1860 The raiyats were impoverished many were utterly ruined But they stood true to their vow to die in this unequal combat rather than submit Sir Peter Grant was then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal In the course of a river tour in the rainy season in the interior of Lower Bengal he saw thousands of cultivators lined up on both sides of the river waving their hands to stop the Governor s steamer The steamer however proceeded on its course without anybody enquiring what this concourse of men wanted Then the raiyats jumped into the water which was known to be infested by sharks and crocodiles The steamer stopped Sir Peter gave them a patient hearing and was convinced by all that he heard and afterwards saw for himself in the villages that the agitation against the indigo-planters was the natural outburst of years of oppression After further personal investigation he moved for a commission of enquiry which came to be known as the Indigo Commission The move was supported by the Governor General in Council and the Commission appointed with the approval of the British Parliament constituted of Messrs W S Setton Kar R Temple W S Fergusson Rev J Sale and Babu Chandra Mohan Chatterji Their report was

submitted to Parliament through the then Governor General Lord Canning, who generally agreed with the Commissioners' findings and their recommendations It caused a commotion in the House of Commons Mr J Laird, one of the Members, said that he had "read their report from beginning to end and, he must say, had risen from its perusal with a feeling of shame and indignation which he could find no words to express" Sir Charles Wood (afterwards Lord Halifax) wrote to the Viceroy in 1861 'I entirely concur with the Commissioners, with the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and with your Lordship that the evidence taken before the Commission, including that of the planter himself, is conclusive as to the fact that the cultivation was unprofitable to the raiyat who was required to furnish the plant at price which, with the extra charge to which he was subjected, did not reimburse him for the cost of production '

As a result of the Indigo Commissioners' report and the country wide agitation that had preceded it, the terms of contract for indigo cultivation were made less stringent and cultivators obtained some appreciable relief The manufacture of synthetic indigo by Germany, which was placed on the market on very favourable terms, gradually made indigo cultivation less profitable and popular, and this tribe of indigo planters gradually disappeared The last Acts of this drama of nearly a century old of planters' rule were being played in the District of Champaran in Bihar in the year 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi paid his memorable visit to that area and set fire to the stage The relics of this race are still to be seen in the huge bungalows, now tottering from age and nature's assault, surrounded by bamboo clumps and *sisam* and mahogany trees in the interior of North Bihar and in some parts of Bengal

The part Shishir Kumar played in this crusade had reached the planters ears and they had tried to persecute him in various ways and hound him out of the District of Jessore But all their combined efforts failed to land him in prison and he and his brothers kept their banner flying

At about this time Shishir Kumar happened to come in contact with the great scholar and educationist, Bhudev Mukherji, who held a high administrative post in the education department The latter was at once struck by Shishir Kumar s parts and his strong individuality Not long afterwards one morning, he was agreeably surprised to receive a letter from Bhudev Mukherji through a messenger, offering him the post of a Sub-Inspector of Schools on Rs 75 per month He had never sought it and

accepted it as a God send Shortly before this, Basanta had also been appointed third teacher in the English School in Bankura by the Director of Public Instruction But on account of bad health, he resigned after a year

Mr Munro, the District Officer of Jessore, though he was widely known as a *zabardast* executive officer, had nevertheless been struck by Shishir Kumar's honesty of purpose and his whole-hearted devotion to work, and on many occasions sought his advice in the details of district administration Two posts of Income Tax Assessors having just then fallen vacant, Mr Munro offered them to Shishir Kumar and Hemanta Kumar, hoping to divert their patriotic activities into other channels and to secure their valuable services for the Government They accepted these posts, as their financial condition was far from satisfactory But they carried on their work for the country and their countrymen with the same zeal as before, though somewhat hampered by the new demand on their time by the Income Tax Department

Basanta Kumar, though in ill health, never lost his urge for the spread of mass literacy and for greater diffusion of knowledge amongst the people in general With this object in view he proposed to his brothers to start a fortnightly magazine dealing with agricultural, literary and scientific subjects The latter greeted the proposal whole-heartedly Shishir Kumar went down to Calcutta with Rs 300 in his pocket and after a good deal of search succeeded in securing an old wooden printing machine for the modest sum of Rs 32 But how could the press be worked without a knowledge of printing? Where were the compositors to be found, some sort of a pressman and the printing accessories, such as types, ink, inking rollers, etc ? He, therefore, engaged himself in a printing office in the metropolis and learnt as much of the art of printing such as composing and other works, as he possibly could in a short time When Basanta Kumar received the report from his brother that he had secured a printing machine, he was overwhelmed with joy In giving this great news to his first sister, he wrote "Do you know, sister, I have come by something of great value to me? It has given me such great pleasure that I cannot help letting you know of it and make you share it with me Is it some job, you think, some kind of an appointment I have got? Of what value is any such thing compared to what I have got? You think I have got a son? Even a son would not have given half that pleasure God has been exceptionally kind to me, sinner as I am It is a printing machine, sister, Shishir has secured for me in Calcutta, which will enable me to realize my life's dream of starting a periodical" This was the dream the three intrepid young brothers

motion before the High Court, the case was transferred from Mr O'Kinealy's court to that of the District and Sessions Judge, who happened to be one Mr Lawford The High Court order exasperated the Joint Magistrate who swore his vengeance Happening to meet Shishir Kumar one day, he told him with a wry smile "We shall see you in jail yet, though you have got the case transferred from my file" "Never!" retorted Shishir Kumar, who always felt secure in a just cause The case came before the District Judge on the appointed date The prosecution asked for adjournment on the ground that they were not ready with all their evidence The real reason behind it was that Mr Lawford had gone on leave and one Mr Lowis was officiating on whom they could not count On the return of Mr Lawford after a few months, the case was taken up Dakhsina Prasad Bose, Government Pleader of Jessore, an intimate friend of Shishir Kumar, was the prosecuting counsel and Monmohan Ghosh, the well known barrister, defended the accused and it was the first brief taken up by this eminent criminal lawyer since he had returned to this country after qualifying himself in the English inns Shishir Kumar was at large on a bail of Rs 1,000 But forgetting the date of his appearance before the court, he was composing a song and putting a tune to it, even when the court hour was drawing near The song was this

I have known, Father, I am Thy son,
Knowing it, I am living composed
Who is going to abduct me now?
Samsâra cares are no more for me
I am released from them,
The worship of Thy feet is all I now seek
If Thou seizest me by the hair
And givest blows,
No hurt is caused to me,
Thou knowest how sweet they are to me
If with angry eyes
Thou lookest at me,
I fear it not,
For I know I am Thy son
Beneath Thy rage-inflamed eyes
I see a stream of love
The mother beats her child,
The child gives a cry,
And anon in her lap he hides
Strike, Father, strike me now,
A hundred kisses wilt Thou give me next

Not long ago he had lost his wife* followed by the death of a dear little boy she had left The song was the expression of his grief Early in life he had imbibed a faith in the goodness of God which he had expressed thus afterwards in his famous book *Kalachand Gita* in the words of God himself Tears follow smiles and smiles follow tears So rolls on my world That which brings tears to the eyes also brings joy thereafter Weep for a while and you shall smile as long Man mourns seeing the sorrows in the world Man forgets that grief is but the seed of joys From seeds of sorrows rises the rich crop of joy †

Luckily the poet philosopher had woke up from his reverie in time to appear in court as an accused hauled up for a criminal offence Numberless witnesses were summoned and examined by the prosecution to prove that Shishir Kumar was the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and as such responsible for the libellous article Even Mr Munro who had since been transferred to another station came to give his evidence producing a private letter which Shishir Kumar had once written to him But his authorship of the article was not established Motilal was then a young lad of 19 years The prosecution hoped that he would blurt out something to establish Shishir s responsibility as the Editor So he was discharged from the list of accused and cited as a prosecution witness It so happened that in a previous case against him and his brothers (for failure to submit the prescribed declaration required for publication of a newspaper) Moti Lal had deposed that his uncle Chandra Narayan was the owner of the press In the present defamation case before him the judge tried to make the best use of it and this callow youth of nineteen was subjected by a seasoned civilian judge to a most searching examination

Judge Who is the owner of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*?

Moti Lal No one It is a public property

The Judge lost his temper and said In a previous case you deposed in a lower court that Chandra Narayan was the owner Now you say that no one is its owner What do you mean by it and which of your two statements is true? Mind you I can haul you up for making a false statement on oath

Moti Lal Of course your worship could do it if I gave false evidence But how do you find that I am making a false statement?

*This was his first wife He married for a second time after some years

† *Vide* p 34 of the English translation of *Kalachand Gita* entitled *In Quest of Bliss*

CHAPTER III

MIGRATION TO THE METROPOLIS

THE *PATRIKA'* continued to be published from the village of Amrita Bazar until October 1871 That year malaria broke out in a severe epidemic form in the greater part of the District, followed by a devastating flood Shishir Kumar's village did not escape these disasters There was not a house without a number of inmates suffering from ague Death claimed its victims Men and cattle suffered equally from a scarcity of food Transport from place to place was rendered extremely difficult Activities in all spheres of life were almost suspended It was found no longer possible to print and circulate the paper from its birthplace Sustained persecution by the lords of a mofussil district had also hampered them in their pursuit of honest journalism They had therefore to look out for a wider and more favourable field for expansion and support

Moreover, the upper class in Jessore town, with which place they were unavoidably in intimate contact, consisting of deputy magistrates munsiffs, schoolmasters and others in the services and the professions, who posed as advanced and cultured by reason of the English education they had received, was, the Ghosh brothers felt, such as did not promise to be of any help in the realization of their life's mission Caught in the glamour of the West, these superior people contracted the vice of drink as a mark of advancement One who did not drink was considered to be culturally primitive Other attendant evils had also crept in It was so not in Jessore alone Throughout Bengal, the impact with Western habits had given a staggering shock to Hindu society, as it then stood with its age old habits and customs, its rites and rituals and its hoary traditions The change was viewed with acute dismay by the discerning and the far sighted A picture of the transformation which Hindu society underwent at that time is given in Kavibhusan Jogendra Nath Bose's *Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt* who was the first to introduce blank verse into the domain of Bengali poetry in his famous epic *Meghnad-Badh* (the killing of

Meghnad, son of Ravana) Waywardness was to them a sign of free thinking, and uprooting of social customs, reformation In exterminating the thirty three crores of gods in the *Puranas*, they came to doubt the existence of God Himself The practice of Sati in Hindu society convinced them that all customs in that society were superstitious Drinking, beef eating, and the taking of food cooked by Mohammedans were to them the first and foremost step towards reformation of society They daringly indulged in forbidden practices expecting applause for what they claimed as their moral courage" The society in Jessore, being more or less constituted on these abnormal lines was repulsive to Shishir Kumar

The brothers therefore decided to shift to Calcutta But it was a painful decision Dear as their own mother was to them their native village of Magura with its rural sceneries, its fragrant air, the green meadows the birds that sang their matin songs the glorious sunsets in the horizon across the long stretched open fields and the moon rising in the East behind an array of palms and coco nuts, and the gentle river Kapotakshi bedecked with *bael* leaves and flowers fresh from the temples, — it broke their hearts to cut these ties Sthira Soudamini, the next younger sister of Shishir Kumar writing the memoirs of the family in her seventy second year, recalls the scenes of their childhood with a vividness unmarred by the dust and storm of the life that had intervened We are indebted to her for the following simple description "That year (referring to a particular year) in the month of *Baisakh*, we had another brother, afterwards named Ram Lal I was then not quite so small and could look after my younger brothers and sisters a little, which gave some relief to our mother We were then eight in number, brothers and sisters My next two elder brothers were then in the Jessore school and lived there with our father But they came home at each week end We went nowhere for our games but played at home amongst ourselves What a pleasure it was! Even now as my memory recalls it a rapture animates my deadened frame When it rained we, brothers and sisters stood gazing at the pouring torrents and listened to the 'drip' 'drip' 'drip' on the leaves of trees as the rain came to its end And then we would run to the pond and see the rise in its water level The frogs that had assembled croaked in their jubilee It was sweet music to us and we were lost in it and stood there long forgetful of everything In the summer evenings we went up to the terrace of the house and under the open sky, with the fragrant south wind blowing, we told stories and amused one another, — stories of the ten headed demon of Lanka, of Sita the model wife of Ahalya and Draupadi, of the love between Rama and Lakshman, of the five Pandava brothers and of a tank in which an old woman lived with a casket of treasures into which no one dared enter for fear of being

dragged by the legs into the deep wells in its middle and not unoften of goblins which were very fond of wicked children We gazed at the rising moon and the stars that shone like jewels on the clear sky and it is difficult for me at this age to describe the simple joy in which we had our being When our mother sang from her bed before daybreak — the night is nearly done the *Kokilâ* coos — we woke up to greet a glorious dawn and to enjoy the soft touch of the morning breeze What innocent days were they when the earth seemed wrapt in some joy not of the earth wherein we lived and grew!

Such was the magic in the setting in which Shishir Kumar was born and brought up And it was not all in vain for the man who later in his life discovered that there was a Great Artist behind this creation whom he described in his *Kalachand-Gita* as being caught one day by a maiden named Rasha Rangini in a lonely wood painting a wild flower beyond compare in beauty pausing now and again to prize His art and at the end hiding it in the grass with tearful eyes unseen by man

It was at the end of October 1871 Shishir Kumar shifted to Calcutta and took up residence at 52 Hidaram Banerji Lane in Bowbazar He had only Rs 300 with him when he plunged into the wilderness of the metropolis not alone but with a large retinue of family members and dependants This capital of Rs 300 was made up of Rs 100 left to him out of the sale proceeds of the printing machine and its accessories after liquidation of all his debts and Rs 200 which Motilal had placed in his hands from his meagre emoluments as a teacher in Peeljung H E School in the District of Khulna

If the district authorities of Jessore breathed a sigh of relief at the voluntary exit of this untractable seditionist they also smarted on having been baulked in their plan to humiliate him The following incident illustrates their feelings Not long after he had come to Calcutta he was summoned to Jessore to give his evidence in a case He met Rash Behari Bose one of the Deputy Magistrates there The latter said Shishir you better get back to Calcutta as soon as your business is finished otherwise you would get into trouble

Shishir Really? What trouble?

Dy Magistrate I was discussing a certain matter with the Joint Magistrate the other day in the course of which he suddenly turned round and said that he had heard that Shishir had come here and that a warrant of arrest was to be issued against him at once

Shishir And my offence?

Dy Magistrate I asked him as much and he answered that the arrest was to be made first and the offence found out afterwards

Mr Smith, the District Magistrate, afterwards a Divisional Commissioner, was astounded at this proposal and promptly turned it down

Shishir Kumar's fame had preceded him to Calcutta Before long, he came in intimate contact with such leading men of wealth and culture as Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore, his younger brother Sir Sourendra Mohan, noted for his musical talents Raja Digamber Mitra of Jhamapukur, Maharaja Kamal Krishna Deva Bahadur of Sovabazar and others of eminence in Calcutta society But he would never ask for any personal favour from them The last named Maharaja had on a certain occasion said to him "Shishir, come and see me now and then' After some days the Maharaja spotting him out at the end of a public meeting accosted him thus "Shishir, I asked you to come and see me now and then but you did not see me since" Shishir Kumar, with a mischievous gleam in his eyes replied smiling "Maharaja Bahadur, it is because of your asking me that I did not come to you I avoid going to them who are inclined to bestow favours" Whether the Maharaja fully understood him or not that day, he came to do so the very next morning when Shishir Kumar went and spoke to him frankly "Maharaja Bahadur, I am an insignificant person, just entering the political field If I came to big people like you too often, people might think I had been visiting them for monetary assistance or other favours' The Maharaja and Shishir Kumar came to be very intimate with each other after that and the former held him in great esteem for his broad outlook, keen foresight and independence of character

The necessity of purchasing a printing machine naturally arose soon after Shishir s arrival in Calcutta One such which had been selected was priced at Rs 600, but he had only Rs 300 with him and he did not know how to meet the deficit The publication of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had to remain in abeyance until a printing office was set up During one of these days of suspense and anxiety, he happened to pay a visit to Raja Digamber Mitra The Raja told him incidentally that a certain debtor of his had just paid back to him a big sum and he was seeking reinvestment Shishir did not feel directly interested in it The next day a relation of his, the *gomasta* of a zemindar, came to his place to stop with him for a few days until he could secure a loan of rupees sixty thousand for his master Shishir took this man to the Raja the next morning and introduced him The loan was advanced by the Raja Shishir Kumar got Rs 800 from the zemindar s *gomasta* as brokerage, most

willingly offered by the latter, out of which Rs 600 went to the purchase of the printing machine He used to say afterwards that he saw the unseen Hand in it He got a number of his trained compositors from Jessore The *Patrika*, thus equipped restarted in Calcutta in February, 1872, in its new garb of a bi lingual weekly, some of its pages being devoted to comments and news items in English

Shortly after this, the country was greatly agitated over a new Income Tax Bill on the Legislative anvil after a period of total abolition of direct taxation Mr V S Sundaram (Indian Audit & Accounts Service) in his book "The Law of Income Tax in India" observes

> Renewed direct taxation in British India made a false start, from which it did not easily recover Possibly, with time and care, a great improvement might have been effected, if the law had remained unaltered But, unluckily, with its too English form, came the idea that the tax was to be as in England, a convenient means of rectifying Budget inequalities and a great reserve in every financial or national emergency With one object or another, twenty three Acts on the subject were passed between 1860 and 1886"

That the people should be exasperated under the different forms of direct taxation which successive Acts imposed was only natural The comment of Mr Sundaram on this is worth a reproduction

> 'The British Govt which had gradually abandoned direct taxation was obliged by financial reasons to revert to direct taxation in 1860 But instead of an indigenous model, softened and adapted to local circumstances, the Government unfortunately set up that of the income tax as in force in England To get direct taxation in a good working order, even after a suitable model, would have been a work of time and care But what, except failure could attend a sudden call on relatively ignorant and unlettered millions, at short notice, to assess themselves, or prove right of exemption, to send in elaborate returns and calculations, and to understand and watch their own interests under the system of notices, surcharges, claims, abatements, instalments, penalties and what not, consequent thereon? Necessarily there followed a long train of evils That both officials and people should have united to condemn an impost hitherto associated only with such evils, is not to be wondered at'

Thus the European community violently opposed it The Anglo Indian papers and most of their Indian colleagues too set themselves against it The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, however, stood almost alone in giving the proposed new measure its full support on certain principles in spite of all its

evils Shishir Kumar tried to convince his countrymen that the tax would come more from the richer mercantile community, from the highly paid Civilians and others in the Services than from the lower middle class and the poor On the 10th April 1873, a cartoon appeared in the *Patrika* illustrative of the manner in which our people came to be led by the nose by the influence of the European community and to form their opinion A *chapkan*-clad Bengali Babu was being pulled by a string, drawn through his nasal septum, by his Saheb office master

Saheb Babu, you understand politics?

Babu Very much, Sir

S —You know the country well?

B —Thoroughly, Sir My great grandfather came from the country, and my aunt is married to a villager of great experience

S —Of course you have an independent opinion of your own?

B —I am particularly strong and tenacious in that respect, Sir

S —What is the most oppressive of all taxes?

B —That, Sir, is a question, Sir, which Sir, I, Sir, — (scratches his head) —

S —I dare say, you would name the Income Tax

B —Assuredly, Sir, I was going to name that hateful tax when you interrupted me, Sir

S —Is not this tax very much hated in the mofussil?

B —They hate! They, — Sir, language fails me to express their feelings, Sir My aunt has heard from her husband some of the doings of the Income Tax Assessors

S —The Assessors are not to be blamed, poor fellows It is the unnatural, inequitable, and —

B —Beg your pardon, Sir I was going to say the same thing My aunt has heard that the assessors are good very excellent jolly fellows, but the tax, the tax, what were you going to say, Sir?

S —The inquisitorial nature of the tax makes the assessors unpopular

B —Yes, Sir, I strongly believe — a belief which is not to be shaken, — that the assessors in spite of their jolliness are very inquisitive, Sir

S —The tax is simply detested

B —Yes, Sir, absolutely detested by those who pay it

S —Not only by those who pay it —

B —Yes, Sir, it is much more hated by those who do not pay it, Sir, than by those who pay it, Sir I am absolutely certain of that, Sir

S —It is demoralizing in its effect

B —Who with a pair of noses in his head can doubt that? I am quite sure that if a proper statistics could be taken, it would undoubtedly prove that since the introduction of this demoralizing tax, thefts have increased in the land, Sir, cyclones have become more frequent, Sir, epidemic fevers universal, Sir, floods more violent, Sir, cattle plagues more virulent, Sir, and — and — Sir — Sir —

S —You must then cry down the Income Tax

B —I was going to propose the same thing to you, Sir

S —You can talk loud?

B —I am a Calcutta Babu, Sir

S —Then we will join with you for your sake and cry down the hateful tax

B —Many thanks, Sir I am particularly thankful, Sir, that I have been able at least to convince you, Sir, that the Income Tax, Sir, is a hateful impost, Sir I very much understand politics, Sir

The opposition to the Bill formed the subject of a debate in the British Parliament The Prime Minister pointed out that when an influential paper like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, an organ of the people, gave its full support to the measure, the outcry against it was to be ignored The Bill came to be passed as an amended Income Tax Act

The *Patrika* came to be unpopular with a certain section of the people in consequence of its support to the Income Tax Bill and its circulation fell off It was therefore necessary to enlist new subscribers At the request of Shishir Kumar, Raja Digamber Mitra wrote private letters to about fifty of his friends in Calcutta to subscribe to it Only one of them, Paran Chandra Mukherji, a zemindar of Tala, did not accede to the Raja's request because of its support to the Income Tax measure, while Dwarka Nath Mitra, one of the first Indian Judges of the Calcutta High Court, said to Shishir Kumar "I have subscribed to your paper But I am afraid your writings are characterized by a virulence which may afterwards come to influence the masses and spread discontent and disaffection in the country" To this the reply was "The *Patrika* was started with a view to cause an awakening amongst the people to their abject condition and to infuse into them a life and a sense of patriotism They are now more dead than alive They need being roused from their slumber Our language has therefore to be loud and penetrating"

Dwarka Nath Mitra was right in his observation But he was not a Tilak, and he had failed to recognize the need of the hour which Bal Gangadhar, of undying fame, had done The latter spoke thus on the 29th December, 1917, presiding over the sixth death anniversary meeting of Shishir Kumar "The country wanted a man who would cope with their (British bureaucrats') devices, — who would see the inner meaning of their devices, — who was courageous enough to meet them, bold and honest enough to expose them, and take defeat calmly and coolly in order to resuscitate for future strength Such was Shishir Kumar Ghose At this time a man was required with a feeling heart to realize the position of the masses who were then governed by a despotic rule, — one who must have sympathy with the people who were unjustly treated and did not know what to do and only looked up to Heaven for help The people were dumb At such a time a man was required to steer the national ship to a safe harbour constitutionally and legally, a man of courage, a man who could see through the actions of the bureaucracy, — actions which were calculated to bear fruit in the distant future' Tilak's direct reference was to the post mutiny days, the sixties of the last century, and Dwarka Nath was speaking only about ten years after, in the seventies, and during this intervening period of a decade, the shackles had only hardened and no opportunity was being lost in forging fresh fetters We know how these fetters were placed on the legs of Tilak himself in 1897, and he was clapped into jail with a sentence of 18 months' hard labour At the time of writing we read in the papers that Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, President of the Indian National Congress, while addressing a largely attended meeting at Allahabad on the 2nd August 1946 in celebration of the 'Tilak Day' said that "the greatness of Tilak lay in the fact that he roused India from her sleep of centuries, and stood up in revolt at a time when few dared criticise the powers that be" As we have seen, Tilak confessed to being a disciple of Shishir Kumar "I have learnt", he said "many lessons sitting at his feet"

The Patrika soon recovered from its temporary set-back and made rapid strides and within a short time came to be even more extensively popular than before Its writings were marked by an originality which met with wide appreciation and readers looked forward with eager expectancy to the day of the week when it came out

During the Lieutenant-Governorship of Sir George Campbell in Bengal, an agrarian riot broke out in the District of Pabna as a result of his own and the District Magistrate Philip Nolan's pro-*raiyat* sympathies which demoralized the tenants who combined against the zemindars and resisted their lawful

demands Shishir Kumar and his brothers, by their well reasoned articles and by visiting the disturbed area, helped to pacify the tenantry They took no sides and were not carried away by frenzy, and never ventilated on a subject with their accustomed forcefulness without being fully sure of facts, very often by sending representatives or going out themselves to verify them on the spot The *Patrika* was probably the first of the Indian papers to organize a system of mofussil representatives to furnish first hand information on all subjects During Sir George's regime, scarcity broke out in Bihar The leading papers pictured it as a famine and raised an agitation The attention of Lord Northbrook, then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, was drawn to it and he warned Sir George that "not one man shall die of starvation" Hemanta Kumar went to the Bihar villages, and returned convinced that it was not a famine but the usual scarcity from which the agriculturists suffered whenever there were any natural causes affecting the normal outturn of crops This was brought to the notice of Government through the *Patrika* but the Government paid little attention to it and about six crores of rupees were spent, a large part of it being sheer waste

Sir George Campbell has always been remembered by the older generation of officials as the creator of the posts of Sub-Deputy Collectors and Kanungoes which have survived till this day From all we know, Sir George was a man of a practical turn of mind, often original in his conceptions The qualifications prescribed by him for the above posts were principally efficiency in riding, good physique, knowledge of surveying and a certain degree of familiarity with English language With these qualifications, they got on very well and those who had the additional gift of abject subserviency thrived early and superseded brother officers who lacked in that amiable quality Shishir Kumar's sense of humour was provoked His pen picture in the *Patrika* of this new class of subordinate officials caused considerable flutter and amusement The *Hindu Patriot* reproduced it and many Europeans purchased this particular issue of the *Patrika* only to read the description

> An expert in salaaming,
> Efficient in riding
> At tail-end a chain,
> The compasses perched on the ear,
> In height five feet inches three,
> 'Tis he that makes our Hazur s qualified Deputy

Sir George also introduced a special kind of oath for Hindu witnesses: they were to depose catching hold of the tail of a cow

Though a staunch advocate of the democratic form of government, Shishir Kumar opposed Sir George Campbell's idea of establishing rural municipalities in Bengal The real reason of it was that he was highly suspicious of any such scheme originating from the brain of Sir George Campbell He thought that Sir George was only trying to impose new taxes without giving the substance of self government to the people He and his brother, Hemanta Kumar, toured in the mofussil explaining to the villagers why the proposed measure was at that time likely to be against their interests "The more the municipalities multiply," wrote he in the *Patrika*, 'the more the Government will shift its own legitimate burden on the shoulders of the people" This was not without reasons, for, in January 1872 the Bengal Government proposed to entrust the Police and primary education to the municipalities His attitude to the introduction of local self government was summed up in an article headed "Bengal Municipal Bill" in the *Patrika* of January 11, 1872, from which the following is an extract "Make these councils elective, let even the chairman be elected by the rate payers and we believe people will not grudge the imposition of fresh taxation If Sir George is sincerely desirous of granting a boon to the people of Bengal, he can have no objection to make such changes in the body of the Bill as would meet the requirements of the people There can be no political danger in giving power over such minor matters as education and sanitation etc, to the people, and we hope Sir George will thus secure the blessings of the forty millions entrusted to his care' He advocated the immediate introduction of local self government for three reasons First, that the management of local administration will give experience to the people in managing their own affairs 'Let the people, he said, "have their own commissioners let the people spend their own money, squander away if they chose, and nobody except themselves will be losers by their folly Experience will at last teach them how to husband their resources and experience is the best of teachers' The writer of *History of Political Thought* observes "There is a general impression amongst students of history that Lord Ripon was the first man to introduce local self government 'as a measure of political and popular education' But as a matter of fact, Shishir Kumar used this very argument for the introduction of local self-government eight years before Lord Ripon did use it In support of this observation, he refers to what Shishir Kumar wrote on April, 16, 1875, in an article headed 'The Municipal Reformation "It may form the nucleus of political freedom of the nation We have hitherto depended too much upon Government Even a social reform we have not dared to undertake without loudly calling for the aid of the Government, widow marriage is to be legalized, poligamy to be abolished obscene literature to be suppressed, and for all these we have poured out deep bewailings into the ears of the ruling

race We have thus rendered ourselves quite helpless and placed our destinies at the tender mercies of our Governors We have forgotten the art of taking care of ourselves, and if we continue in this state a century more, we shall be under the necessity of seeking the aid of our rulers even in managing our own household affairs It behoves our countrymen, therefore, to bestir themselves and urge upon the Government with all their might to teach them to govern themselves" These arguments formed his second reason His third reason was that it would teach the *raiyats* that they had got certain rights and a consciousness of it would give them the courage to resist the oppressions of their landlords and of petty government servants In an article headed 'Mofussil Self Government', he wrote on August 31, 1882 "The Government has done much to conciliate the higher classes of Indians, but it has done nothing to conciliate the masses The masses pay all the taxes and what do they get in return? Education they have not got Protection? Protection from whom? They get no protection from the oppression of government servants They are much more oppressed by the Police and tax gatherers than the better classes As for protection from the strong, it is true that the stronger cannot now beat the weak at his pleasure, but he can do worse He can harass the *raiyats*, ruin them in law courts and that is worse than beating The self government measure will, however, be a real boon to them It will teach them that they have political rights which they can exercise to their advantage, and thus they will be naturally more loyal to the constituted authorities than they are at present"

His idea about local self government, however, was far more comprehensive than what Lord Ripon conceived it to be He wanted the introduction of a purely elective system in the mofussil municipalities, and he also strongly objected to the appointment of Magistrates as Chairmen of District Boards

Bankim Chandra Chatterji never agreed with Shishir Kumar in such advanced views of local self government He wrote a bitter satire ridiculing the idea of demanding or accepting local self government without first securing national autonomy

On the assumption of office by Lord Northbrook as Viceroy, the proposed Village Municipal Bill was shelved Sir George Campbell's enthusiasm received a shock and he is said to have resigned on account of his pet measure not receiving the Governor General's assent Though anxious to do good to the people, Sir George had failed to understand them and, in spite of possessing some of the best qualities of an Englishman, had not won their heart Shishir

Kumar came in conflict with many of the policies initiated by him and exposed them at times in ruthless satires One of them, headed 'Political Geometry', reproduced below, showed the deep political insight of the writer and gave the amused officials food for reflection while smarting under its stings

Chapter I — Definition

1 A political point is that which is visible to the Government but invisible to the people

2 A line of policy is length without breadth of views

3 A political figure is that which is enclosed on one side by ambition and on another by hypocrisy

4 A political circle is a plane figure contained by one line of policy and is such that a certain point within this figure keeps the circumference firm and united

5 And this point is called interest

6 A political triangle is a wedge which is usually gently introduced at the beginning of any new impost

7 Parallel lines are lines of policy which, though they never meet always tend to the same direction

Chapter II — Postulates

1 Let it be granted that any tax may be imposed upon any section or class of people without their permission

2 Let it be granted that any measure may be introduced or withdrawn at the pleasure of the Government

3 Let it be granted that any promise may be made or broken provided there be a nominal pretext at hand

4 Let it be granted that a deficit may be shown where there is a surplus

Chapter III — Axioms

1 Might is always right

2 England governs India for the good of the latter

3 Things which have black cover have also a black interior

4 Things which have a white cover have a white interior

5 Black can never be white, neither white black

6 The promise or opinion of one individual is equal to the promise or opinion of the whole nation

PROP I — PROBLEM

Given a permanently settled revenue on land to draw a road cess from it

From the southernmost point of Bengal to the northernmost point, describe the condition of the zamindars Promise 19 guns to Maharaja of Burdwan (post 3) and impose (post 1) an income tax Take this point, from which draw the cess and produce it to the *raiyats* As one zamindar, the Raja of Burdwan, promised to pay the income tax, it is therefore binding on all zamindars (Ax 6) Then, because the road cess is drawn from a point where the income tax intersects the permanent settlement, they are therefore parallel and the road cess is therefore drawn, etc, etc

Q E F

Obs Latterly Stifel attempted to prove this proposition by Axiom 1st only

EXERCISES ON PROP I

Given road cess, to find the educational cess, the medical cess and other cesses

The *Patrika* made its existence felt as a powerful organ of public opinion when Mr Stratchey, Acting Governor General after the assassination of Lord Mayo, was trying to curb the progress of higher education in India The opposition to Mr Stratchey's proposals was successfully led by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Hindu Patriot* backed by Krishto Das Pal on behalf of the British Indian Association After the arrival of Lord Northbrook, the permanent incumbent, Mr Stratchey's proposals were abandoned and the menace to the progress of higher education was removed

On the 2nd of April 1874, the office of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was removed to Bagbazar and even to this day it is being published from that locality, where it has grown up from a toddling child of six to a hoary patriarch, — well-nigh an octogenarian It continued to grow in stature and strength in spite of meeting obstacles at each step That it should not find favour with the ruling class, whose policy of spoliation and acts of injustice and oppression were being exposed in its columns in every issue, could be understood But it was somewhat of a surprise to find that a certain section of our own countrymen should see seeds of sedition in the new political gospel preached by Shishir Kumar as the first exponent of the extremist school of Indian politicians

The same year (1874) Shishir Kumar managed to rouse the wrath of European officialdom by bringing to light the culpable shortcomings of the District Judge of Rangpur, Mr Levin, and consequent corruption Mr Levin did not know Bengali His legal lore was also limited He therefore depended on his *Sheristadar* to write out his judgements Some pleaders of the Rangpur Judge's Court brought it to Shishir Kumar's notice and sought redress through the columns of the *Patrika* Under his advice two affidavits were sworn before the Subordinate Judge, and published in the *Patrika* of the 30th of April, from one of which the following is an excerpt

"We, Hira Lal Mitra, Mitiar Rahaman, Ramkamal Roy, Koylashchandra Sen, Mahimchandra Mazumdar, Krishnachandra Sircar, Gopalchandra Chakrabuty, Shyamamohan Chakrabuty, Mahesh Chandra Sircar, Pearilal Roy, Prasanna Nath Chowdhury, Kalidas Moitra, pleaders practising at the Judge's and Sub Judge's Court at Rangpur do solemnly declare and affirm as follows

'I That we know and believe that the present Judge, A Levin, does not understand the current language of the court, has no adequate knowledge of the law and regulations in force and is regardless of the duties of his high and responsible post

'II That we know that the *Sheristadar* of the court, Wooma Charan Sen, sits with the Judge in the *ejlas*, takes down notes of the arguments addressed to the court by the pleaders, dictates to the Judge in open court the orders that have to be passed in the ordinary course of the Judge s official duties and that the said *Sheristadar* does write out the judgements decreeing or dismissing cases which the Judge afterwards merely copies out and passes off as his own

. .

'VIII That we do believe that the said *Sheristadar*, Wooma Charan Sen, is the real Judge and the Judge is a mere puppet in his hands and that the *Sheristadar* takes bribes and disposes of cases in favour of the highest bidder'

As a result of the *Patrika's* agitation, Sir Louis Jackson one of the High Court Civilian Judges, went personally to Rangpur to make an enquiry The truth of the allegation was established The ministerial officer who had acted under orders of Mr Levin was dismissed but the latter was only made to resign after he had left the country on leave This was in striking contrast with the treatment accorded about this time to one of the first Indian Civilians Surendra Nath Banerji who was hauled up as a felon for certain official irregularities during his novitiate as a Joint Magistrate in one of the Bengal districts

In what light the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and its conductors came to be viewed by the Europeans, official and non-official, can be guessed from the following incidents Mr Ironside, District Magistrate of Benares, had called in a Bengali homœopathic doctor of Calcutta, Loke Nath Moitra to treat him for his eye affections He was cured of them In the course of a friendly conversation he asked the doctor if he knew the *Patrika* brothers and if they were organizing a movement to upset the existing form of government Again, when an indigo-planter of Darbhanga District wanted to cut an embankment to irrigate his indigo fields at the expense of the neighbouring *raiyats* lands, there was apprehension of a riot and the District Magistrate sent a Bengali Inspector of Police to prevent the cutting On his arrival at the spot, the Inspector found the *bara sahib* of the indigo concern at the head of a large number of his men ready to cut the embankment The Police Officer warned him that if he attempted it, he would be arrested under orders of the Magistrate The planter was inflamed 'What? A Bengali Babu to arrest me! He got hold of a pick-axe and started cutting The Inspector arrested him "You must be one of the *Amrita Bazar* gang said the discomfited planter "or who else being a Bengali would dare lay his hands on the person of a Sahib?'

The first requirement for the uplift of the country, Shishir Kumar foresaw early in life, was to infuse political consciousness into the higher middle class and the proletariat The former were too busy earning their living wage in their respective spheres to realize their own degraded condition or to imagine that there could possibly be any means of rising out of the slough in which they were sunk The latter were steeped in illiteracy and ignorance Neither of them were conscious of their inherent rights and privileges and of their birthright as human beings As subjects of an all powerful *ma bap* government to seek a privilege was to them the height of impudence, and to assert one's rights open disloyalty Not a grain of the gunpowder now to be found all over the country, above or below the surface was anywhere to be seen, and far less the revolutionary urchin to ignite it Shishir Kumar in any case was none of it Yet we have it on the evidence of his sister, Sthira Soudamini, that on the occasion of a marriage ceremony in his native village there were some fireworks displayed At the end of it Shishir, then a boy in his teens was found exploring the sites and collecting gunpowder left strewn all over the place Boyish freak of course, without any thought of the urchin yet unborn This was in the fifties In the seventies we find Shishir Kumar and his brother Hemanta Kumar making strenuous efforts to organize political associations in district and subdivisional headquarters all over Bengal While the former exhorted the middle class people to organize themselves politically,

the latter travelled from district to district consolidating the organizations The Dacca People's Association and the Murshidabad, Santipur and Ranaghat Associations were all formed in the year 1872, and later on those in Jessore, Khulna, Rajshahi, Burdwan, Hooghly, Barisal and Mymensingh In Murshidabad, Shishir Kumar at first found himself somewhat hampered in his work by the obstructive attitude of Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the famous novelist and author of the *Bande Mataram* song, then posted as a Deputy Magistrate at that station As a Government official he did not openly participate in political movements Further, in this matter of starting political associations in the mofussil with a view to awaken the masses, of whom the cultivating class formed the bulk, Bankim Chandra held that the mofussil zemindars were as a class despotic and the tenantry could not be expected to assert their rights until the former were brought under the effective control of Government and their autocratic spirit curbed In his opinion it would be premature to start the Associations until this was done When Shishir Kumar accompanied by Akshoy Chandra Sarkar, another literary genius of the day, went to parley with him, the far seeing patriot, who had silently sown through his novels the seeds of the extremist school of thought, which burst a quarter of a century afterwards, gave Shishir Kumar the snubbing "It is not meet that Shishir should assume the rôle of a Guru and offer advice to his elders" But Shishir Kumar was not the man to be baffled By cogent reasoning he succeeded in converting Bankim Chandra from a powerful oppositionist to a friendly co-operator ready to help with his advice and guidance A District Association was then established at Berhampur

Having finished their tour and formed District Associations, the brothers now turned to organizing a Central Association in Calcutta To enlist his sympathies and secure his co-operation, Shishir Kumar approached Ananda Mohan Bose who had just returned from England after qualifying himself as a Barrister Ananda Mohan, too, had been thinking of forming some kind of an association for the purpose of educating the people politically He fully approved of Shishir Kumar's proposal but felt that before starting to organize it, it was necessary to give the people some preliminary education by holding meetings at different places in Calcutta where the present day politics and the objects of the proposed central organization might be explained to them But Shishir Kumar held a contrary view In his opinion, unless the Association was first formed, it would be difficult to initiate the people into politics He held that after the Association had been formed, its members would be available for the kind of propaganda work which Ananda Mohan had in view Ananda Mohan, however, stuck to his own opinion, and submitting to his advice, Shishir Kumar held meetings and delivered lectures There

into the Association and they came to shape its policy, it would lead to the spread of discontent and lawlessness There was therefore no other alternative to Shishir Kumar than to form a separate society for the large middle class community with an objective and a policy of its own Its annual subscription was fixed at Rs 5

Shishir Kumar was one of those thoughtful men of his time who conceived the idea of self government for the country By taking up this ideal, the Indian League came into special prominence and grew in importance Sir Steuart Hogg was at this time the Commissioner of Police and Chairman of the Calcutta Municipality, and what is now known as the Municipal Market was named after him Sir Steuart was an overbearing official He did not care for the interest of the rate payers and had rendered himself unpopular not only to the Indian but also to the European community Shishir Kumar resolved to rid the residents of Calcutta of the despotic rule of Sir Steuart and his henchmen He therefore conceived the notion of introducing the elective system into the Municipality Sir Richard Temple, who had now succeeded Sir George Campbell, had also come to be convinced that some reforms were urgently needed in the management of the Calcutta Municipality, and was contemplating to enact some measure for that purpose Shishir Kumar, having sensed this view of the Lieutenant-Governor, considered it an excellent opportunity to push his scheme of the elective system through the medium of the Indian League He proposed to the president, Sambhu Chandra Mukherji, to hold a public meeting of the citizens of Calcutta to support the elective system Sambhu Chandra gave his approval, but there was some trouble over the choice of a suitable person to preside over the meeting At the end, Mr J Wilson, Editor of the *Indian Daily News*, was proposed to be the chairman and on the 23rd October 1875 there was a mammoth meeting of the citizens of Calcutta in the premises of the Beadon Street Theatre Rev Kalicharan Banerji, Vakil Amarendra Nath Chatterjee and other eminent men thrilled the audience by their eloquence and the affair created a great sensation The *Englishman* of the 25th October 1875 commented as follows

> The monster gathering of the middle classes of the native community at the Beadon Street pavilion on Saturday last is a sign of the times, the significance of which it would be difficult to over rate The meeting shows two things at least It shows that a strong desire to be heard, arising more or less out of the dissatisfaction with the existing order of things in this city, animates what in all civilized communities is the most important section of the public, and it shows that the section of the public in question are not contented to have the care of their interests in the hands of a self seeking plutocracy The meeting of Saturday is in

fact, the first marked sign of the awakening of the people on this side of India to political life We have received several letters from natives, calling in question both the representative character of the meeting and the motives of those who called it To our thinking, the manner and character of the attendance afford a sufficient answer to those insinuations "

Sir Richard Temple was touring in the mofussil when the meeting was held. In course of his tour he was struck by the power which the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had come to exercise in giving a lead to the middle class people and the regard and esteem in which its promoters were held After this tour, Sir Richard was disabused of his suspicion that Shishir Kumar was a seditionist and a revolutionary Generous minded as he was, he realized that it was perfectly legitimate to agitate for reforms by constitutional methods and to awaken political consciousness amongst the people At the same time, he evinced a desire to meet this people's man, Shishir Kumar, and an opportunity to do so presented itself shortly after Sir Richard had arranged for a river party on board the steam-launch, *Rohtas*, to which notable men had been invited He invited Shishir Kumar also, though the latter had never called on him Shishir Kumar, at first unwilling to join the party, was afterwards persuaded by his friends to accept the invitation On board the launch, he kept himself aloof from the company and loitered about on the deck Sir Richard mixed freely with his guests but missed Shishir Kumar He asked Narendra Nath Sen, Editor of the *Indian Mirror*, if Shishir Kumar had come Narendra Nath answered that he had and the next moment caught hold of Shishir Kumar and brought him to Sir Richard. Then the following conversation ensued

Sir Richard Shishir Babu, I had heard of your name but never met you, as you did not call on me

Shishir Kumar: I am a very insignificant person and did not think myself worthy of the Lieutenant-Governor's acquaintance

Sir Richard That you are not what you call yourself, an unimportant person, I realized during my recent visit to the interior of this province I found that people in the mofussil read your *Patrika* with great care and eagerness and they seemed to hold you in considerable regard I am very happy to meet you

Shishir. I consider myself very fortunate to hear you say so

Sir Richard Can you tell me, Shishir Babu, if my administration has been for the good of the people? Are they happy?

Shishir So long as the Rent Law (Act X) remains in force, there cannot be amity between the zemindars and their tenantry It follows that people in general cannot be living happily

Sir Richard Can you suggest any measure which would conduce to their happiness?

Shishir· If you really wish to bring about peace, happiness and contentment amongst the people, first abolish Act X and then give them local self government

Sir Richard was somewhat struck by the answer and said "I find that you are making an agitation to introduce the elective system in the Calcutta Municipality But tell me frankly if you are fit for it"

Courteously but firmly Shishir Kumar answered in the affirmative Sir Richard was greatly impressed by Shishir Kumar's candour, firmness and love for his countrymen displayed in the course of this short interview At the end, on the way down to Calcutta, Sir Richard wished him good luck and asked him to come and meet him in the Belvedere, as he felt he had to talk with him on various important questions

The very next day Shishir Kumar went to the Belvedere and presented his card ' The orderly peon in attendance refused to take his card to His Honour in the absence of a previous appointment Shishir Kumar was about to turn back disgusted, when for some reason or other, Sir Richard happened to come out on the verandah Shishir Kumar approached him and said. "I came to you only at your request I have been waiting for nearly half an hour Your orderly peon seems to be very uncivil, for, in spite of my repeated request, he did not take my card to you" Sir Richard understood Shishir Kumar's chagrin and appeased him by courteously explaining why it was necessary to make a previous appointment They went into the garden and after a stroll, sat down to a frank exchange of views Sir Richard started by saying that whatever advancement he had made in service was in Bengal and it was his earnest wish that he should make his name always remembered by the people of the province for some material benefit he could confer on them Shishir Kumar wished to be enlightened as to what kind of benefit was working in his mind Sir Richard said "I have been making enquiries from different quarters as to the reaction on the public mind caused by the mammoth meeting convened by you in support of the elective principle for the Calcutta Municipality I find that certain sections are opposed to it For instance, the British Indian Association and the European community would start a violent agitation if I sponsored a bill to introduce that system,

personally, though, I believe in it The other thing in my mind is a technical school" Shishir Kumar gave this answer "If your conscience tells you that the elective system will be a beneficial measure, should you back out of it from fear of the opposition of the British Indian Association or the European community? The people will remain ever grateful to you for the measure and you will always be remembered in Bengal as one of its greatest benefactors" Obviously impressed, Sir Richard assured Shishir Kumar that he would take the fullest responsibility on himself for the proposed measure but he must have considerable popular backing Shishir Kumar on his part undertook the task of securing this support

It was not long before the British Indian Association and its adherents came to know of Shishir Kumar's meeting with Sir Richard and of the latter's leanings The Association had the strong backing of the European community They both realized that if, as was proposed, two thirds out of the seventy-two Justices (as the commissioners were then called) were elected by the ratepayers and only twenty four nominated by Government, then the influence they had so long exercised over the civil administration of Calcutta would be reduced to nothing The Europeans, who were largely instrumental in the misuse of the ratepayers' money, feared that the measure would bring their perquisites and privileges to a speedy end Both these parties joined in organizing a violent agitation against the proposed elective system Sir Richard sent for Shishir Kumar and suggested that he should demonstrate by convening a public meeting of the ratepayers of Calcutta that the large majority of them were in favour of the elective system, otherwise, it would be impossible to introduce it in the face of the agitation that was going on A public meeting was accordingly convened in the Town Hall at the instance of the League on the 12th February 1876 The British Indian Association had also called a meeting in its rooms on the same date and at the same hour Sir Richard went out incognito to the two meeting places to gauge the strength on each side and found that those in support of the elective system far outnumbered those who had agitated against it He made up his mind and sent a strong minute in favour of introduction of the elective system to the Viceroy, Lord Northbrook In despair, the British Indian Association sent sixty of its members to the Belvedere to wait in deputation on the Lieutenant Governor They urged,—knowing that such a preposterous proposition would make the Government abandon the proposed measure wholesale,—that they had no objection to the elective system if the Government did not reserve any power to nominate a certain percentage of the Justices but provided for all the seventy two of them being elected by the ratepayers Sir Richard understood the ruse and gave them a reply which made them hang

their heads in shame Similarly, the League sent a deputation of thirty-eight representatives of the ratepayers to the Lieutenant Governor They submitted that only one fourth of the Justices might be nominated by the Government and not one third, to which proposition, however, Sir Richard did not agree.

The Municipal Bill came up for consideration by the Legislative Council on the 4th of March 1876 With the previous permission of the Lieutenant-Governor the British Indian Association sent the well known Wahabi case counsel, Mr Ingram (then law lecturer in the Presidency College) to represent its views before the Council The Chamber of Commerce was represented by Mr Jennings, the Municipality by Mr Branson and the Indian League by Kali Mohan Das, Vakil, Dr Rash Behari Ghosh and Shishir Kumar In the absence of the Lieutenant Governor, the Advocate General of Bengal, Mr Paul, presided After the British Indian Association's representative, Mr Ingram, had exhausted his list of defects in the elective system, Kali Mohan Das, as the seniormost representative, rose to speak on behalf of the League Dr Rash Behari Ghosh and Shishir Kumar were startled to find that their spokesman was giving his support to the opposite party They quietly pulled him by his coat and warned him But it was of no avail Since coming to the Council Chamber and hearing the arguments on the other side, Kali Mohan Das had come to change his views Dr Rash Behari left the Chamber in disgust Shishir Kumar rose to his feet and addressing the President said "I have got very little to say I only request the President to go through these papers, containing the signatures of nearly fifty thousand of the ratepayers of this city in support of the elective system It is for the Government now to reach the correct decision" With these few words he placed the paper on the President's table Mr Paul on going through them was compelled to say that in view of the opinion of fifty thousand ratepayers the opposition of a comparatively very small section of them could not prevail with the Government At a subsequent sitting of the Council on the 25th March 1876, the Calcutta Municipal Bill was passed

The part played by Shishir Kumar in the elective system being introduced in the Calcutta Municipality is best told in the words of Sarada Charan Mitra (ex Judge of the Calcutta High Court) speaking at the fifth death anniversary meeting held in memory of Shishir Kumar

> "I saw Sir Richard Temple at the humble cottage of Shishir Kumar discussing with him questions relating to the Municipal constitution and it was in Shishir Kumar's cottage that the embryo of the Municipal constitution of Calcutta was hatched'

Sir R —Yes, a technical college is the crying need of the country, but you will need a large sum of money Have you got it?

S K —Almost Only if Your Honour will be so good as to help me

Sir R —In what way?

S K —Babu Harish Chandra Roy of Mymensingh and Babus Dhanpat and Lakshmipat of Berhampur are each willing to contribute Rs 50 000 Your Honour may tell them that this is the best way to use the money

Sir R —Very well, if they come to me, I may persuade them

S K —But you are going away tomorrow at 6 a m My plan is this. It is now 9-30 If you will kindly give me letters to the three gentlemen asking them to see you before 6 o'clock tomorrow morning, I will arrange the rest

Sir Richard smiled and said "What you suggest is irregular from the beginning to the end I do not know them and yet I am required to privately ask them to come And when they come, I am to ask them to oblige me by contributing Rs 50,000 each" But Shishir Kumar was resolved to have the letters The clock struck 10 Sir Richard was at last prevailed upon and he gave the three letters asking the gentlemen to come and see him before 6 o'clock next morning With these in his possession, Shishir Kumar made straight for their houses The zemindars felt greatly flattered by the invitation and nearly lost their night's sleep in their agitation At 4 o'clock next morning, Shishir Kumar started with them for the Belvedere The day had not dawned when they reached there The Lieutenant-Governor's orderly seated them on the verandah adjoining Sir Richard's bedroom He came out with half sleepy eyes and after apologizing for having troubled them to come at such an early hour, appealed to their patriotic spirit and got Harish Chandra to subscribe Rs 45,000, and Dhanpat and Lakshmipat Rs 40,000 each On the 25th December 1875, a public meeting was held in the premises of the National Theatre presided over by Sir Richard to thank the donors for their generous contributions and to invite public support to the cause of technical education Shishir Kumar's efforts were crowned with success to the utter dismay of his opponents The institution was inaugurated as the 'Albert Temple of Science' and obtained a yearly subsidy of Rs 8,000 from the Government

With the growing importance and activities of the League, it was found expedient to have a change in its presidentship Shishir Kumar called on Rev Krishto Mohan Banerji, who was at that time held in the highest esteem by the educated community of Bengal for his profound erudition, and requested him

he could put Shishir Kumar in his place Next time Shishir Kumar came to the Belvedere, Buckland asked him if he had made an appointment On his replying in the negative, he was told that His Honour could not see him Shishir Kumar insisted that he had a very important subject to discuss with His Honour and promised that he would try to observe the visitors' rules in future Grudgingly, Buckland sent in his card to the Lieutenant-Governor Shortly after this interview, he came again to see the Lieutenant Governor and again without an appointment Buckland protested A spiteful banter found expression in his words Shishir Kumar told him that he had come at the express wish of His Honour to discuss matters relating to the Calcutta Municipality After some hesitation, the Private Secretary sent in his card and he was ushered in immediately Shishir Kumar won over Buckland afterwards by placing in his hands Rs 6,000 collected from Dhanpat Singh for the Zoological Garden of which Buckland was the secretary From that time, Buckland and Shishir Kumar got on very well

Sir Richard was promoted to the Governorship of Bombay and left Calcutta at short notice The people of Bengal did not have the opportunity of according him a befitting farewell and giving expression to their gratitude for all that he had done for them This was a lapse which Shishir Kumar wished to rectify Accompanied by Rev. Kali Charan Banerji and Brajendra Kishore Roy he went to Bombay to organize an evening party there, on behalf of the people of Bengal Sir Richard was then at Poona Shishir Kumar went there and made the proposal to him He accepted the invitation but said that as he had already made out his tour programme, he would not be free until after some weeks Shishir Kumar told him he could not wait there so long without detriment to important work pending in Calcutta Sir Richard was therefore obliged to cancel his tour programme He came to Bombay on the appointed date, and a grand evening party was held with the co operation of Sir Mangal Das Nathbhai, one of the most influential magnates of Bombay The function cost nearly Rs 14 000 of which the major portion came from Brajendra Kishore Shishir Kumar returned with the satisfaction of having been able to render unto Sir Richard what was due to him from the people of Bengal

Sir Richard Temple was succeeded to the Belvedere Gadi by Sir Ashley Eden The latter did not like the bold and independent spirit of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and wanted to convert it into a semi government paper Kristo Das Pal and other Bengali leaders had been won over, and he thought he would buy up Shishir Kumar too, who was then living in much straitened circumstances When he met Shishir Kumar for the first time, the conversation

lasted for a few minutes only and was mainly regarding the Albert Temple of Science. When they met next and for the last time,—this Governor of an important province like Bengal and a poor journalist,—the character of both came out in bold relief in the course of their conversation:

Sir Ashley: Shishir Babu, I am a friend of the Bengalis and I like them. I count you as one of my best friends and will talk frankly with you without standing on ceremony. Can you say why you abuse us day in and day out and write scurrilous articles against the Government? Lord Northbrook showed me some of them which were so abusive that I had to hang down my head in shame.

Shishir Kumar: Your Honour says that we have been abusing. But pardon my impertinence, I challenge anyone to show one abusive expression in our writings. Besides, the law is such that if we had written anything seditious, the Government would have pounced upon us. Since the Government has not done so, it proves that we are always within the bounds of law.

Sir Ashley: The Government is generous and you take advantage of it.

Shishir Kumar: Can Your Honour point out any expression which is abusive, scurrilous or even impertinent?

Sir Ashley: I know that you are very *chalâk* (clever) in that respect. You don't call us robbers, thieves, cheats or murderers in so many words. But one can see at a glance that you mean nothing else.

Thus far Sir Ashley had kept himself under restraint, without showing any temper and had gone on smiling as though he was speaking in a jocular vein. Shishir Kumar with his quick insight had seen through Sir Ashley and spoke with circumspection.

Sir Ashley continued: I have mixed with the Bengalis, as you know, intimately, and I am conversant with their wants and their grievances. I have told Lord Northbrook that the articles in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* are worthless and might be ignored.

Shishir Kumar: If the articles are so, why do they bring headache to the Government?

Sir Ashley: You should bear in mind, Shishir Babu, while writing your articles, that India is a large country and not an insignificant village. You should not forget that for criticizing the administration of this vast empire great judgement and a far-sighted vision are required. I believe you do not quite know how to agitate in a newspaper so as to do some good to the country. I suggest that before you publish your articles, you may show them to me and I will make the necessary changes. Occasionally I shall write your articles myself.

Shishir Kumar I hope that Your Honour is not joking I cannot imagine the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal helping the *Patrika* by writing articles for it

Sir Ashley I am not joking but talking very seriously It is not known that I often write articles for the *Hindu Patriot* If you do not mind it I shall gladly take over the editing of your paper It will be to your advantage, for in that case you and I will virtually rule Bengal

Shishir Kumar said with a meaning smile What will then be Kristo Das's fate?

Sir Ashley Of course he also will be associated with us

Shishir Kumar very respectfully asked him how the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* published from Bagbazar would be conducted by Sir Ashley from the Belvedere

Sir Ashley The Belvedere will always remain open to you You will be able to see me daily if you want it I shall select the subjects of the articles and I shall exercise the privilege of guiding you in writing them I have got long administrative experiences and an important province like Bengal is in my charge and I believe I can give you sound guidance

For a moment Shishir Kumar did not know how to meet this challenge without an open rupture with the Governor which he wished to avoid But the rupture came Shishir Kumar, speaking with consummate courtesy, gave the reply ' Your good intentions and highmindedness are known to the whole of India But I do not see how your proposals can be put into practice I shall have to see you daily sometimes more than once in the day, and by previous appointment too These visits will be serious interruptions to your work And if it comes to be known that you are secretly conducting the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* your reputation will suffer in public estimation I do not like to be indirectly a party to Your Honour's earning a bad name I suggest that the *Patrika* may continue to be conducted as at present but I promise to seek your advice from time to time

Sir Ashley Shishir Babu your arguments do not carry force with me I shall instruct my Private Secretary to admit you whenever you come to see me No previous appointment will be necessary And as for my reputation, I feel myself competent to take care of it

Shishir Kumar gave no reply Sir Ashley finding that all his proposals and insidious gestures to bring material gain to the young man were resolutely turned down by him flew into a rage I fail to understand said he, "how you dare oppose the proposals of the Governor of Bengal and antagonize him '

Unconcerned by this display of uncouthness, Shishir Kumar replied "Is it not the wish of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal that there should be at least one honest and independent journal in the whole of India?" This was only adding fuel to the fire Losing all sense of decorum, Sir Ashley spluttered "Bear in mind, Shishir Babu, that within six months I shall see you out of Calcutta"

Shishir Kumar Your Honour is the supreme ruler of Bengal You can do with impunity anything you wish But do not imagine, Your Honour, that if I am hounded out of Calcutta, I shall die of starvation I can still go back to the country and till my lands

Sir Ashley got up from his chair and shook with anger Shishir Kumar also stood up and faced him squarely And he said "I am under your roof and you can do anything to me here But I had not expected the Governor of Bengal to behave in this manner However, this is the last time I come to meet you" And with this, he left the room

The first thing Sir Ashley did to wreak his vengeance on Shishir Kumar was to stop the Government grant of Rs 8 000 to the Albert Temple of Science He tried to put a clog on the working of the new Calcutta Municipal Act but failed He asked Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore what he thought of Shishir Kumar and the *Patrika* and the Maharaja asked Shishir Kumar to be on his guard He said he could sense that efforts were afoot for giving a death-blow to the *Patrika*

By this time, Lord Northbrook had been succeeded by the Tory Governor-General, Lord Lytton, who, on assumption of his office, came to view the growing criticisms of Government policies with grave concern He was considering the advisability of re imposing censorship on Indian newspapers, particularly on those published in the vernacular languages He took the Local Governments into his confidence and was supported by all of them except Madras where the vernacular papers had not yet acquired sufficient strength or importance to require a restrictive measure of this kind

On the 14th March 1878, it was reported in some of the Calcutta papers that a Bill for the more effective control of vernacular newspapers would come up before the Imperial Legislative Council that day for consideration and it would probably be passed forthwith Shishir Kumar understood the import of the move He sent his brother Motilal to attend the Council as a visitor The Bill was passed at that one sitting and came to be known as the Vernacular Press Act Not only purely vernacular papers but also bi lingual papers like

the *Patrika*, which was partly English and partly Bengali, came within its purview Under the provisions of this Act, the printer and publisher of any paper in an Indian language could be called upon to enter into a bond not to publish anything likely to excite disaffection against Government If a newspaper contravened this law, it was at first to be warned and if the offence was repeated, its equipment was liable to be seized For those who wished to avoid this risk, a system of pre censoring the proofs was introduced With this measure, Sir Ashley hoped to force Shishir Kumar to shut up shop and go back to his village to till his lands

Indian resentment against this measure was intense Shishir Kumar could see that the new weapon was particularly aimed at the *Patrika* and he stood up to challenge the enemy's bluff

It was a memorable day, the 14th of March 1878, in the life of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* Shishir Kumar was waiting at home in suspense to know the proceedings in the Council Chamber when Motilal rushed in, seething with excitement "A calamity has befallen us," he said, "the vernacular press has been gagged" Shishir Kumar was already prepared for the blow The brothers had a conference, and in the course of the next four or five days put together the necessary equipment,—not an easy job in those days,—for converting the *Patrika* into a purely English newspaper And its next issue, which was due on the 21st March, that is, just one week after the promulgation of the Act, came to the hands of its readers composed entirely in English from beginning to end *The callow Bengali journalist had scored over the redoubt*able Lieutenant Governor of Bengal

This reactionary legislation came up before Parliament for a debate Gladstone fought hard for its repeal but was defeated by an overwhelming majority of the Tory members When Lord Ripon succeeded Lord Lytton, he resolved to inaugurate a new era He was possessed of enough foresight to perceive the growing discontent in the country as a result of the policy hitherto pursued by the reactionaries in his Council from imperialistic motives He realized that a despotic policy could not but result in the deterioration and possibly the disintegration of political relationship between India and England One of his first measures to counteract this tendency was a Bill for the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act which he introduced on the 7th December 1881, with the preamble that "in the opinion of Government, circumstances no longer justified the existence of the Act" As President of the Council, he took a strong stand in the debate against his reactionary colleagues and had the Act removed from the Indian Statute Book

CHAPTER IV

IN THE THICK OF BATTLES

WITH the transformation of the bi lingual *Patrika* into a purely English journal, a new chapter opened in the life of the paper. Lord Lytton and Sir Ashley had wanted to gag it Instead, it became more voluble, and its circulation increased rapidly in all parts of the country A special edition, named the 'Overland Edition' had already been in circulation, when it was bi lingual, for readers in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies, Travancore and the Central Provinces It leaped into further prominence after its sensational transformation and people in South India were specially attracted by the political philosophy of Shishir Kumar and his bold way of approach to the problems of the day To quote Tilak again "I know with what enthusiasm and eagerness the *Patrika* was awaited in my province every week forty years ago I know how people were delighted to read his (Shishir Kumar's) sarcasm, his pithy and critical notes written in his racy style, simple but at the same time effective,—how people longed to see the paper on the day it was due by post, how people enjoyed it,—I know it personally'

Shishir Kumar struck a new note when he wrote that 'we as human beings have all the aspirations and privileges of human beings and we do not know how England can reasonably refuse our demand" Even a subject race, he pointed out, had its political rights and the rulers were bound to investigate into and redress the grievances it had He always stressed that the ruling class could not understand us "It is not for a foreigner," he wrote in the seventies, "to come and analyse the manners, customs, civilization and genius of such an intelligent and exclusive race with a language, literature, genius, philosophy and a religion of its own

An agitation was started by the Anglo Indian papers against the zemindars, alleging mismanagement of their estates and oppressions of tenants

The target of the attack was Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement of Bengal, which the sponsors of the movement sought to nullify by the imposition of the road and public works cesses The *Patrika* strongly opposed the measure The British Indian Association also opposed it at first but later, being unable to realize its implications fully, tacitly acquiesced in it Shishir Kumar's efforts in this matter did not meet with success and the cesses are still realized both from the *raiyats* and the zemindars

If Shishir Kumar was a friend and supporter of the peasants, he was as much a strong champion of the sovereign rights of the independent Princes of India If the subjects of any of these Princes proposed to seek redress of grievances from the British Government, he dissuaded them from doing so and asked them to go to their own rulers And if any of these Princes incurred the displeasure of the British Government, the *Patrika* fearlessly defended his cause The outstanding case in point was that of Mulhar Rao, Gaekwar of Baroda In Lord Northbrook's régime, he was accused of having attempted to poison the British Resident, Col Phayre, and a Commission of three Indian Princes and three British officials was appointed to try him The charge against him was not proved but he was deposed on a charge of mal administration of his State, and one of his kinsmen was installed on the Baroda gadi In a series of articles, Shishir Kumar pointed out that the British Government had pledged itself in 1858 that the Indian Princes should be maintained in their sovereignty in consideration of the fact that they had remained friendly to the Government during the Mutiny, and that the British Government had no jurisdiction to interfere with the internal management of the Native States On the deposition of Mulhar Rao, he demanded a definition of the prerogatives and privileges of the Indian Princes and insisted that the Gaekwar was a sovereign Prince and as such was "not under the jurisdiction of our *Penal Code*".

In the matter of Mulhar Rao's deposition, the *Hindu Patriot* gave its support to Lord Northbrook with the result that the Indian public lost their confidence in that paper On the other hand, the *Patrika* came to earn further public estimation by its fearless advocacy of Mulhar Rao's cause The *Hindu Patriot* read sedition in Shishir Kumar's support of Mulhar Rao and openly tried to persuade the authorities to prosecute the *Patrika* Mr Paul, the then Advocate-General of Bengal, was asked by Government to give his opinion as to whether a case could be made out against the latter paper Mr Paul held that the articles which had been referred to him for opinion could not be construed as seditious and no sensible jury would pronounce a verdict of 'guilty' in the case He advised Government not to launch a prosecution In

its zeal to support Mulhar Rao's deposition, the *Hindu Patriot* went so far as to say that "the country could afford to lose many a Mulhar Rao but could ill afford to lose the services of such an enlightened, high-minded and just statesman as Lord Northbrook" The *Patrika* commented on the *Hindu Patriot's* attitude in an article headed 'Patriot's Patriotism' exposing its *amor patriae* ruthlessly

The *Bharat Sanskarak* (Indian Reformer) pointed out to the *Patriot* that it was highly improper, unjournalistic and impolite on its part to have tried to incite the Government against the *Patrika* and put it into trouble

Shishir Kumar next took up his pen on behalf of the Maharani of Rewa who was bitterly persecuted by Sir Lepel Griffin, the Agent of the Governor-General in the Central India States The dispute arose over the education of the Prince, the minor son of the Maharani, who protested against the arrangements for the purpose made by Sir Lepel This was enough to infuriate the autocratic Agent who put the Maharani into trouble in various ways Pestered and humiliated, the Maharani was obliged to leave the palace and seek peace in the seclusion of a forest She had written to the Viceroy "We are declared rebels, troops and artillery were arrayed in front of our abode, At last I left the State and went to a foreign place, where I lived in a jungle for more than six months" The comments of the *Patrika* on Sir Lepel's persecution of the Maharani attracted the attention of Lord Dufferin who proposed to pay a visit to the Rewa State The Maharani was asked to be present at Rewa in view of the visit This she declined to do until steps were taken to free her and the State from Sir Lepel s oppressions Shishir Kumar supported her throughout and Lord Dufferin succeeded in stopping further persecution of the Maharani

The Begum of Bhopal was the next victim of Sir Lepel As an autocrat he could not brook any symptom of an independent spirit in the ruler of a Native State As a first step to curb the liberty of the Begum, Sir Lepel made all her correspondence pass through him Matters came to a head when the Begum married a respectable Afghan, named Nawab Siddique Hussain, who was equal to Sir Lepel in shrewdness Sir Lepel tried his best to get the Nawab out of the State but failed, in spite of all the help and support he derived from some dismissed servants of the State and other malcontents Shishir Kumar, having been apprised of the state of affairs in Rewa, took up the case with his characteristic vigour He managed to secure copies of Sir Lepel s correspondence from the latter's correspondence file through a bookseller of Bhopal and published them Sir Lepel moved the Government, in his official capacity as

Agent, to take legal action against the *Patrika* but the Viceroy refused to do so Sir Lepel then sought legal opinion to prosecute Shishir Kumar in his private capacity Eventually he gave up the idea on hearing that W. C Bonnerjee, the eminent counsel and jurist of the day, had said that if Sir Lepel took any such step he would subject the latter to a searching cross-examination which might last for a whole month in the course of which all his vagaries and illegal actions would be fully exposed Sir Lepel submitted his resignation and returned to England He wanted to ventilate the matter in Parliament and went to consult Mr Bradlaugh, one of its Members, for the purpose Mr Bradlaugh was however, already posted up with Sir Lepel s persecutions and refused to see him The *Indian Daily News* in one of its issues of January 1889 commented as follows

> 'Proud as he is, it must have been great humiliation to him to knock at the door of an M P and to be refused admittance It was a case of 'Take physic, pomp' Sir Lepel was spurned from the door just as he has spurned the Chiefs of Central India and especially as he treated with the greatest contumely the lady who has ever been a friendly ally of the English Government"

The deposition of Maharaja Pratap Singh of Kashmir was another episode remarkable for the courage and skill with which Shishir Kumar championed the cause of this Indian Prince

In 1886, Lord Dufferin appointed Mr Plowden Resident in Kashmir Maharaja Pratap Singh had protested against this appointment pointing out that under the terms of the Treaty of 1846 with Gulab Singh Government had no power to appoint any Resident Lord Dufferin promised that the Resident would only act as an adviser and would not interfere in the State administration Immediately after his arrival, Plowden took up an attitude of hostility to the Maharaja Pratap Singh's brother Amar Singh sided with Plowden The Resident wanted to annex Gilgit for the British Government, which was a part of Kashmir, but which he considered necessary for the defence of the North-West Frontier He soon discovered that he would not succeed in his attempt to annex Gilgit so long as Pratap Singh was on the throne Pratap Singh sought protection from the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, and as a result, Plowden was removed from Kashmir Col Parry Nisbet succeeded Plowden Instead of pursuing a different policy, he took up the cause of his predecessor A conspiracy was started with the aid of Amar Singh and by questionable means, the signature of Pratap Singh was secured on a document which purported to state that the Maharaja was laying down his office for five years

Lord Lansdowne had in the meantime succeeded Lord Dufferin A great agitation was started in support of Pratap Singh both in Kashmir and outside

In its issue of October 3, 1889, the *Patrika* published a secret document of the Foreign Office with the following preface

> "Today we shall publish a document which will startle India — probably Lord Lansdowne himself Lord Lansdowne, we are credibly informed, has been very much disgusted with the Kashmir business We have a very high authority for stating that His Excellency was actuated by the best of motives in accepting what he calls the Edict of Resignation by the Maharaja But when he accepted this responsibility of governing Kashmir through a Resident he had no notion that there was so much intrigue to put the matter mildly, surrounding the business His Excellency s heart now recoils at what he is obliged to do to defend a measure which is wholly untenable A noble Englishman of principles, His Excellency is not willing to stick to a measure which his conscience does not justify And, therefore, he is only seeking an opportunity to restore Kashmir to its legitimate owner Our information, incredible as it may appear, is derived from such a high source that we cannot help putting faith in it
>
> "In the following document, the original of which His Excellency will find in the Foreign Office, the Viceroy will find the real reason why the Maharaja of Kashmir has been deposed It will be seen that His Highness was deposed not because he resigned or oppressed his people, but because Gilgit was wanted for strategical purposes by the British Government Mr Plowden proposed that the principalities of Gilgit should be occupied by the British Government at once, and this proposal of Mr Plowden was the main cause of his downfall Sir H M Durand, the Foreign Secretary however, condemned Mr Plowden's proposal, and him as Resident, in the following memorandum which was submitted to the then Viceroy, Lord Dufferin'

And the secret document was the memorandum referred to above, being the opinion of the Foreign Secretary H M Durand on the question of occupation of Gilgit and the first part of it ran thus

> "To His Excellency,
>
> "I do not agree with Mr Plowden, the Resident in Kashmir, in this matter He is too much inclined to set Kashmir aside in all ways, and to assume that if we want a thing done, we must do it ourselves
>
> "The more I think of this scheme, the more clear it seems to me that we should limit our overt interference as far as possible to the organization of a responsible military force in Gilgit So far we can hope to carry the Durbar thoroughly with us If we annex Gilgit or put an end to the suzerainty of Kashmir over the petty principalities of the

neighbourhood, and, above all, if we put British troops into Kashmir just now, we shall run a risk of turning the Durbar against us and thereby increase the difficulty of the position I do not think this is necessary No doubt we must have practically the control of Kashmir relations with those principalities, but this we already have Indeed, the Durbar has now, since the dismissal of Lachman Das, asked Mr Plowden to advise the Gilgit authorities direct without reference to them If we have a quiet and judicious officer at Gilgit, who will get the Kashmir force into thorough order and abstain from unnecessary exercise of his influence, we shall, I hope, in a short time have the whole thing in our hand, without hurting any one's feelings

(Sd) H M DURAND
6th May"

"Very well

(Sd) DUFFERIN
10th May"

The *Patrika* went on to say:

"All the suggestions contained in the above have been carried out Capt A Durand is just now in the neighbourhood of Gilgit, with a junior medical officer, the political agency has been established, and eventually Major Mellis has gone to Kashmir on the part of the Durbar to submit a scheme for strengthening the Government policy Sir H Durand s suggestions have been disregarded only on one point, and that, we believe, by himself He says, 'we already have the control over the Gilgit principalities and we can have the whole thing without hurting any one s feelings' Being one of the wisest men in India, why did not Sir H Durand stick to the wise suggestion of his own of controlling the affairs of Kashmir without hurting any one's feelings? So it will be seen that, when Sir John Gorst said that he would not be surprised if a feeble-minded man like Pratap Singh would withdraw his resignation, or when Lord Cross declared that the Maharaja cruelly oppresses his subjects, or when Lord Lansdowne wrote to the Maharaja that His Highness was an extravagant and bad ruler, they were not aware of the real reason of the Maharaja's deposition It was Gilgit that the Government wanted

"*One of the rumours very current in India is that, when the Viceroy* comes to Lahore, the Foreign Office will invite the Maharaja to meet His Excellency there The Maharaja would, of course, come, and then he would be persuaded to open a real Edict of Resignation We notice this rumour at all to show how people are prone to attribute all sorts of motives to the Government We have, however, very little doubt that there will be a meeting at Lahore, and we hope everything will be satisfactorily settled If there be any talk of Gilgit, of course the Maharaja should cordially co-operate with the Government for the *defence of the Empire*"

This disclosure sent a wave of sensation all over India Lord Lansdowne did not think it advisable to prosecute the *Patrika*, but an Act was passed on 9th October 1889 to prevent disclosures of official documents and information, 'the Official Secrets Act' Pratap Singh's case ultimately went up to Parliament where it was championed by Charles Bradlaugh with material help from Shishir Kumar and Motilal Pratap Singh was eventually reinstated in his throne

The manner in which the sympathy and co-operation of Charles Bradlaugh were secured not only in respect of the Kashmir matter, but also for the welfare of this subject nation in general is a story by itself When this high minded Englishman and Member of the British Parliament was requested by Shishir Kumar to ventilate the grievances of the Indian people from his place in Parliament, he replied that he was much too busy with his mission of amelioration of the conditions of the working classes of his own country to take up the cause of India But a series of fortuitous circumstances led to a reversal of his attitude He happened to come to Bombay in the year 1889 when the Indian National Congress was in session Motilal Ghosh had gone to attend it as a delegate He called on Mr Bradlaugh and pleaded with him to take up India's cause in Parliament Mr Bradlaugh turned down Motilal's importunities repeatedly, explaining that he was wholly ignorant of Indian affairs and that he was likely to be defeated at every step by the Secretary of State for India on account of such ignorance It was only when he was assured of help from the *Patrika* through the agency of his friend William Digby, who was already well acquainted with Indian affairs, that Bradlaugh agreed to take up India's case Maharaja Pratap Singh's matter was then agitating the whole country, and Motilal asked Bradlaugh to interest himself in it The latter replied that he did not wish to have any connection with the Princes of India and their affairs Then the following colloquy took place

Motilal What is their offence?

Bradlaugh Moti Babu, I am a poor man If I came to be in touch with the Rajas and Maharajas, it might be said that I was in their pay

Motilal Would you accept a bribe if it be offered to you?

Bradlaugh By no means But my friend, Mr Hume, has advised me to keep aloof from them

Motilal Your sense of chivalry is well known throughout England and India People know that you would give your life, if necessary, in pursuit of truth and in the support of just causes Your integrity is beyond

question Do you think it right to go back on your life's principle merely on hypothetical misgivings?

Bradlaugh: Moti Babu, do you know that Babu Jogendra Chandra Bose, Pleader of Lahore, and Mr I C Sarkar, State Engineer of Kashmir, had come to me on the same errand and had to go back disappointed?

Motilal But I am not going back like that

Bradlaugh Well, all I can say is that if the Maharaja comes to me personally and convinces me of the injustice done to him, I may possibly take up his case in Parliament

Motilal explained to him that placed as the Maharaja was at the time, it was not possible for him to come and meet him Bradlaugh asked Motilal how was he then to be convinced that the Maharaja's subjects were grieved at his deposition, and was assured that representatives of the subjects would come and see him and place their case before him Bradlaugh's comment was that he would decide his course of action only after he had heard them It so happened that three delegates had come to the Indian National Congress from Kashmir Motilal saw them and under his advice, they went to Bradlaugh with a written representation detailing the injustice done to the Maharaja and their own plight since his deposition It was then that Bradlaugh was persuaded to take up the Maharaja s case in Parliament

In this fight for the Indian Princes, Shishir Kumar was not only inspired by his lifelong motto to stand up against injustice and oppression, but he was also determined that their sovereign powers should remain unimpaired He had foreseen the downward drift of British policy in relation to the Indian States from 1858 when Queen Victoria assumed direct charge of the government of this country Dodwell is of opinion that since then, "the fiction of sovereignty of Indian States disappeared and the Princes became subjects, high in rank indeed but still the subjects of the Queen,' though, as pointed out by Shishir Kumar in 1877, it had been settled in that year, 1858 that the Indian Princes should be maintained in their sovereignty in consideration of their loyalty to the British during the Mutiny of 1857 The next step towards divesting them of their sovereignty and whittling down their position as independent ruling Princes was, as perceived by Shishir Kumar, the policy of granting sanads of succession to them, inaugurated by Lord Canning in 1862, and investing them with the Order of the Knighthood of the Star of India If these were indirect steps to placing the Indian Princes under British subjection, the claim of suzerainty over them was openly proclaimed during the Premiership of Disraeli (1874 1880) When the Royal Titles

Bill was introduced in the House of Commons by Disraeli on the 17th of February 1876, Shishir Kumar saw in the Bill another step to divest the Indian Princes of their sovereignty He wrote on the 8th of June of the same year "They can now depose an Indian Prince if they choose it but they cannot do it without rousing an intense clamour The Princes demand an international law, they claim independence and resent interference, but if the British India Government is once acknowledged as the Lord of the Princes, the people will feel less if this acknowledged Lord interferes with his vassals"

His intellect was keen enough to understand as he wrote, that "the real object of the Imperial Assemblage at Delhi in 1877, was to declare openly that the English were the paramount power in India and that the Princes were all vassals". Prof Ramsay Muir in his *A Short History of the British Commonwealth* (Vol II, p 594) has indeed since admitted that Disraeli "sent the Prince of Wales on tour through India (1875), thus making the British monarchy a living reality to the Princes and peoples of that vast land, he invented the sonorous title of Empress of India and ordained that all the Princes should be assembled in a great Durbar to render homage' As has been aptly observed by Dr Biman Behari Majumdar in his contribution to *History of Political Thought* * "it reflects great credit on the political insight of Shishir Kumar Ghosh that he was able to discover the drift of the situation which led successively to the deposition of Mulhar Rao, the Gaekwar of Baroda in 1875 to the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1875-76, the passing of the Royal Titles Bill in 1876 and to the holding of the Durbar in 1877" The Doctor goes on "Shishir Kumar is of opinion that imperialism that is the subjection of many countries to one, is harmful not only to the conquered but also to the conqueror He holds that whenever a nation or a people conquered an empire, its decadence began from that time He shows how the Athenians, Romans and the Moghals lost the finer traits in their character on the assumption of imperial power According to him, an empire is specially dangerous to the liberty of a democratic people like the English Hence he saw in the continuation of holding of India as a mere dependency a danger to the English constitution' The writer concludes his article on 'Political Thought of Shishir Kumar Ghosh', referred to above, with this deserved compliment to Shishir Kumar's intellect 'Thus did Shishir Kumar foreshadow that anti imperialistic movement in India which has become almost a part of the Congress activity today" And the same compliment was paid by W S Caine in his Introduction to Shishir Kumar's *Indian Sketches* when he said that the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* "has, beyond any other press influence, helped to mould

* Published by the University of Calcutta 1934 The reference is to Vol I Bengal (1821-84)

that New India which has given birth to those patriotic aspirations, finding their mouthpiece and interpreter in the Indian National Congress movement." And there can be no better testimony to the clear and far vision of this great politician than in what he wrote sixty-four years ago, warning the country of the danger to the democratic movement in India from the claim of special privileges of the Musalmans. "Those Musalmans", he wrote in the *Patrika* of 26th October 1882, "who are for special privileges must not forget the interests of India. The spectacle of Hindus and Musalmans quarrelling over the texts of the *Puranas* or the *Koran* is not at all a serious affair. . . . But it is altogether a serious affair, when the unthinking Musalmans cry for special privileges, the effect of which can do no good to themselves, but would be very weakening to the country."

Shishir Kumar was the first amongst the politicians of the day to raise his voice in protest against the amendment of the Criminal Procedure Code by Sir James Stephen, Law Member of the Government, which sought to abolish the trial of certain classes of offences by jury. It was also its object to vest the trying magistrates with more extensive and summary powers. The Anglo-Indian papers supported the measure, and most of the political leaders took their cue from the arguments adduced by the former in favour of the Bill. Even Kristo Das Pal told Shishir Kumar when the latter approached him for concerted action against the proposed measure: "The sooner the system of trial under which the guilty can more easily escape punishment is abolished, the better for the country. Sir James Stephen is introducing the measure with the best of intentions and for the good of the country, and we ought to give him our support rather than protest against it." Even the Indian National Congress was not persuaded to oppose the measure until it was influenced to do so by Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore. The Government paid no heed to the protest and the system of trial by jury in the specified instances was abolished. Another measure to vest magistrates with more extensive powers was the Presidency Magistrates Act of 1877 which did away with the system of trial of cases which had obtained from the time of the East India Company's Supreme Court. At the instance of Shishir Kumar and under the auspices of the India League, a public meeting was held in the Town Hall which was very largely and influentially attended and in which leading men of the day like Raja Shama Shankar Roy, Surendra Nath Banerji, Mr. Fink, Rev. Kali Charan Banerji and others raised their voice of protest. The Bill was nevertheless passed and the executive grip still more firmly tightened.

Lord Ripon succeeded Lord Lytton in the Viceroyalty of India and was at first misunderstood by Shishir Kumar. The reason for this happening was

that soon after his assumption of office, Lord Ripon was found openly expressing his sympathy for the mill hands, working as they were under very unfavourable conditions, and Shishir Kumar feared that the motive behind His Excellency's benevolence was to support the merchants of Manchester who had raised a cry that Indian mill-owners treated their workers very shabbily in order only to serve their own vested interests Shishir Kumar wrote a series of articles criticizing the extraordinary solicitude evinced by the new Viceroy for the welfare of the Indian mill hands At the instance of His Lordship, his Private Secretary, Mr Primrose, sent Shishir Kumar a few books which Lord Ripon had written, requesting him to go through them before forming an opinion about him He would then, Mr Primrose assured him, come to know what a liberal minded and large hearted Englishman His Lordship was He added that he would be glad to introduce him to His Lordship and the latter would greatly appreciate his suggestions on many pending administrative questions of the day One of these was the introduction of local self government towards which His Lordship had already taken some steps He had drafted a Bill himself, not satisfied with the draft made by his Secretary, Mr Mackenzie, and he had circulated it for public opinion But up till then, it had not received that support from the Indian public which His Lordship had expected Shishir Kumar, however, saw in it a great step forward towards self rule and gave it his unqualified support Lord Ripon, on going through the articles in the *Patrika*, asked his Private Secretary to write to Shishir Kumar to come and see him to discuss this question Shishir Kumar replied expressing regret that being in bad health, he was then unable to comply with His Lordship's request Mr Primrose again wrote to him referring to the articles in the *Patrika* on the contemplated measure of local self government which His Lordship had greatly appreciated and suggesting that a personal discussion with him would be very helpful to His Lordship Shishir Kumar could no longer refuse the invitation When he met His Lordship, the latter expressed his disappointment that Shishir Kumar's countrymen had failed to grasp the far reaching significance of the contemplated measure Shishir Kumar explained that very often, through fear of incurring the displeasure of the local authorities, the people were reluctant to give free expression to their views He suggested that if the District Officers explained to them the scope and the object of the Bill, it was likely to receive warm support His Lordship gave him a letter of introduction to Sir Rivers Thompson, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, and asked him to see the latter Sir Rivers sent round a circular to all the Divisional Commissioners directing them to instruct the District Magistrates to explain fully to the people the scope and importance of the Bill Sir Rivers then planned a tour into the interior with a view to see for himself the results of the action taken by the

District Magistrates As soon as this news reached Shishir Kumar and Hemanta Kumar, the latter went from village to village, held meetings, explained to the people the object of the Bill and all its present and future implications, and apprised them of the Lieutenant Governor's impending visit The result of this propaganda was that the Governor was given a rousing reception wherever he went, the flags on the triumphal arches and those carried by the processionists bearing the slogan "We want self government" The Local Self Government Bill was passed but not without a violent opposition from the European community

Lord Ripon was highly impressed by the political insight of Shishir Kumar and, like Sir Richard Temple, sought his advice on many administrative questions For instance, His Excellency wanted to call for an explanation from the Allahabad High Court for the acquittal (in appeal) of some European soldiers who had, in a state of intoxication, committed criminal assault on an Indian woman Shishir Kumar advised him not to lower the dignity of the High Court by doing so openly, but to take measures confidentially against such gross failure of justice in future On the other hand, when a European named Webb, employed by the Government in the tea plantations of Assam for protecting the coolies against the oppressions of the planters, was accused of brutal violence on a coolie woman resulting in her death and was let off by the Assistant Commissioner and Magistrate of Jorhat, Mr McLeod, with a fine of Rs 100, Shishir Kumar raised an agitation in the *Patrika* and also brought it to the notice of Lord Ripon His Excellency's Government passed a resolution from which the following is quoted

> "On a review of Mr McLeod's proceedings, the conclusion of the Government of India is that the allegations which have been made of a miscarriage of justice in this case must be largely attributed to the failure of the Assistant Magistrate to make a full, searching and properly conducted enquiry It is difficult to exaggerate the mischief which is done by such a case as the present There is no Province in India in which a strict, firm and impartial administration of justice between European and natives is of more vital importance than it is in Assam, and there is no place where cases arising out of assaults or alleged assaults by Europeans on the natives are more likely to occur or where it is more important that such cases should be thoroughly investigated"

Lord Ripon came to be gradually regarded by the European community as pro-Indian The Ripon régime was in fact characterized throughout by the struggles of a liberal and sympathetic Governor-General with the reactionaries in his Council all of whose acts were prompted by imperialistic motives As stated before, Lord Ripon resolved to repeal the Vernacular Press Act, and on

the 7th December 1881 a Bill was introduced for its repeal and passed in the teeth of the opposition of his Councillors

The measure which nearly drove him out of the country was the Ilbert Bill, so named after Sir C P Ilbert, the then Law Member of the Council The agitation over this Bill was the most outstanding event in the political history of Bengal after the passing of the Vernacular Press Act The Bill sought to remove the provisions in the Code of Criminal Procedure under which Indian members of the Service were not competent to try European British subjects, the jurisdiction to try such subjects in the mofussil being limited to officers who were themselves European British subjects The attention of the Government of Sir Ashley Eden, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, having been drawn to this anomalous position, the Bill was prepared, introduced in Council and circulated for opinion

The entire European community in India was up in arms at the proposal The indigo and tea planters were specially furious The agitation over it stirred up a feeling of race antagonism such as had never been aroused since the Mutiny of 1857. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* played a prominent part in this agitation and openly described the Britishers in India as 'cowards' The newspaper *Englishman* was highly incensed at this and said "The modern radical may, one would think, be expected to understand that the spirit which openly describes the English in India as cowards, is one that cannot be safely tolerated" Shishir Kumar retorted in the *Patrika* of 1st March 1883 "The *Englishman* is offended because of the application of the epithet of 'cowards' to his constituents We call them cowards who join with wives and children and madmen to protect themselves while they are conquerors, rulers, masters and lords over everybody and almost in everything We call them cowards who seek shelter in intrenchments, keeping the weak out to fight their battles We call them cowards who do not venture an open and fair trial, who demand special privileges for criminals and who demand lighter punishment for crimes committed by their class and higher punishment for others" The agitation grew fast and furious A big public meeting was *held in the Calcutta Town Hall where two Europeans, J J J Keswick and* J H A Branson, Bar at law, *fulminated*, the latter spoke thus

> "The Bengali Babu may have the glorification of reigning over,—of judging his conquerors whom, gentlemen, he has really had the audacity to stigmatize as 'cowards'! Verily and truly, the jackass kicketh at the lion! As you value your liberty, show him that the lion is not dead but sleepeth, and in God's name let him dread the awakening"

Shishir Kumar's answer to this published in the *Patrika* of the 8th March 1883,

was this: "Now, braying makes a jackass and the question is who brayed Mr Branson fancied that he was roaring like a lion and his admirers fancied the same fancy But only two days after the meeting, he appeared before the public with his tail within his legs, showing indisputably that he was not a lion but some animal lower than it" Advocate Branson was boycotted by the Indian solicitors and had to leave the country

Sir Henry Cotton in his book *Indian and Home Memories* has given the following account of this agitation

> "A public meeting of protest by the European community was held at the Town Hall in Calcutta, members of the Bar abandoned the noble traditions of their profession, and speakers and audience, frenzied with excitement, were lost to all sense of moderation and propriety The Viceroy was personally insulted at the gates of Government House. A gathering of tea-planters assembled and hooted him at a railway station as he was returning from Darjeeling when 'Bill' Beresford then an A.D C, was with difficulty restrained from leaping from the railway carriage into their midst to avenge the insult to his chief The non-official European community almost to a man boycotted the entertainments at Government House Matters had reached such a pitch that a conspiracy was formed by a number of men in Calcutta who bound themselves, in the event of Government adhering to the proposed legislation to overpower the sentries at Government House, put the Viceroy on board a steamer at Chandpal Ghat and deport him to England round the Cape"

The Europeans of Calcutta losing their balance altogether, the *Bombay Gazette* called them 'drunken helots' and a fair minded European writing to that paper observed "Any attempt on the part of the Englishmen to lower the dignity of the Viceroy or to weaken his authority in India is short sighted, unpatriotic, dangerous and cowardly, especially when we remember that mutinies and rebellions are not put down by lawyers and voluble gentlemen such as those who gathered in the Calcutta Town Hall"

Lord Ripon remained unruffled and said

> "To arguments which are inconsistent with the declared policy of the Crown and of Parliament, it would be inconsistent with my duty to listen But to fair reasons urged in a manner to which the Government can give heed, ears of myself and my colleagues will always be open on this and every other question I observe that the opponents of the Bill speak of appealing to the House of Commons I am the last man in the world to object to such a course being taken To the decision of the House of Commons both parties to this controversy must bow"

After nearly two years of unabated agitation a treaty was made between the Government and the European community, practically abandoning the

measure and victory going to the latter In the words of Sir John Stratchey: "Act III of 1884 extended rather than diminished the privileges of European British subjects charged with offences, and left their position as exceptional as before"

When Shishir Kumar went to bid farewell to Lord Ripon at the end of his term, and implored him to confer on his countrymen the privilege of trial by jury, His Lordship regretted that as he had already made over charge to Lord Dufferin, he could do nothing more, but promised to speak to the latter The jury system has since been introduced in many districts of Bengal

When Mr Hume was contemplating to form the Indian National Congress, he had a discussion about it with Shishir Kumar He pointed out that in order to build up a truly national organization, the masses must be awakened If it rested merely on the support of the higher and middle classes, it would come to be a stately structure on a foundation of clay Mr Hume said that the masses did not know him and he failed to see how he could enlist their co-operation Shishir Kumar replied that he would demonstrate how to secure it The higher political problems, he said, were incomprehensible even to the average run of educated men How could the illiterate masses feel interested in them? How could they grasp the significance of an agitation for simultaneous Civil Service examination, enlargement of the Legislative Councils with a larger proportion of Indian members in them, and similar subjects? They would rather appreciate measures to prevent waste and mismanagement of the Road Cess funds, Police persecution, the iniquities of the proposed Chaukidari tax and its attendant evils and other domestic matters affecting their everyday life He did not stop with this verbal exposition He and his brothers set about organizing meetings in important towns and villages of Bengal for the education of the people This went on for two years and eventually, on the 13th March 1886, they convened a mass meeting at Jhikargacha, a big village of some importance eight miles west of Jessore, which was attended by about fifty thousand people Sambhu Chandra Mukherji presided and Ananda Mohan Bose and other leading men from Calcutta took part in its proceedings, which were reported even in some American papers The meeting attracted the serious attention of the Government of India and further enhanced the reputation of Shishir Kumar as an indefatigable worker for the people The Chaukidari Bill was one of the principal subjects discussed at the gathering and it was unanimously condemned as a measure calculated to be very oppressive in its operation As a result of this agitation, the Government was obliged to drop the Bill

The increased popularity of Shishir Kumar caused some jealousy and heartburning amongst his contemporaries They organized other meetings at which they delivered long and learned speeches which were hardly understood by the common folk, and in a sense they helped to allay the apprehension of Government from any such popular demonstrations When Mr Ranade came down to Calcutta after an interview with Lord Dufferin in Simla, he called on Shishir Kumar and told him that Lord Dufferin had confessed that the Jhikargacha meeting had caused some concern to his Government, in that it sought to impress upon the masses that their interests were being sacrificed by Government and by teaching them to raise their voice in protest The reports of the other meetings had, however, his lordship said, allayed much of this anxiety A leading Calcutta newspaper of the time made the following observations on the Jhikargacha meeting and on the got up ones which followed it

> "The editor of the *Patrika* hates got up mass meetings sham agitation and vapid resolutions that betray love for notoriety and lack of force, but there is no man we have seen in this country who understands better the value of sound organization, agitation in the proper spirit and resolutions that mean purpose and are not mere words It is an open secret that the staff of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* were the animating spirit of the Jhikargacha *raiyats'* meeting, perhaps the only agrarian gathering of value that we have had in this part of the country of late, with a peaceful end in view If Shishir Kumar Ghosh keeps aloof from 'Associations', it is from Associations that have no understanding of the first principles of organizations and that proceed to undertake government of a country on the strength of quoted sentences and borrowed ideas which they themselves comprehend very little and their countrymen less"

When the authorities of the Postal Department were found insidiously excluding the children of the soil from employment in that Department, specially in the higher grades Shishir Kumar took up their cause and wrote a series of articles which attracted the attention of Government Through his brother Motilal Ghosh, appearing as a witness before the Public Service Commission, he exposed ruthlessly the extent of the injury done to the Indians As a result of the Ghosh brothers' agitation, the entry of half-educated Europeans and Anglo-Indians into the Postal Department was for a while suspended and Indians came to be taken, though only for the less important posts The gradual disappearance of the Anglo-Indian class from the Postal Department is to be largely attributed to the efforts of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*

The evidence given before the Public Service Commission by some of the officials threw a flood of light on their true mentality One of these was

Mr. Beames As District Officer of Cuttack, he had organized a society with the ostensible object of culture of Bengali literature, professing to demonstrate his great love for the Bengalis and their language But appearing before the Commission, Mr Beames, now a Member of the Board of Revenue, deposed without turning a hair that it was the educated people of this country who spread discontent and disaffection through seditious newspaper articles, and the less they were employed in the services of Government, the better for the administration In his opinion, the Europeans were undoubtedly better qualified for the Executive and Judicial Services than the Indians He went so far as to urge that Indians should not be allowed to enter the Indian Civil Service Shishir Kumar took this as a great libel on his countrymen and demonstrated the extent to which Europeans could be trusted for their honesty and integrity, by exposing Mr Beames himself On the 21st April 1887, the following challenge appeared in the *Patrika*

> "We are curious to know if there are any records in the Bengal Secretariat showing that Mr Beames, now an officiating Member of the Board of Revenue in Calcutta by the grace of Sir Rivers Thompson, has been in impecunious circumstances in his official life There have been some instances in which Mr Beames has had to borrow money of native gentlemen connected in some way with the districts in which he held office and now that he is placed in a very high and responsible post in this province, we take it that the holder thereof has now placed himself in such a position that he is no longer under the necessity of begging for loans, and that the Government has satisfied itself that his surroundings are such as not to impair his efficiency Mr Beames has had to borrow monies from Roy Dhanpat Singh and late Roy Lachmipat Singh, zemindars and bankers of Purnea and Murshidabad And at one time when he ceased to have any official connections with Bengal and Bihar, that is, when he was the District Magistrate of Cuttack and officiating Commissioner of the Orissa Division, he did not feel himself restrained by any consideration of delicacy and honour from applying for a loan of Rs 30,000 to late Raja Digamber Mitra of Calcutta, who owned the very valuable zemindary of Patamunda in the District of Cuttack Raja Digamber very wisely did not choose to lend the money himself, but got a relative of his, a Hindu lady, to advance the sum of Rs 30,000 to Mr Beames Mr Beames, it must be said, is not now under any pecuniary obligation to this lady We are not familiar with the rules which govern the Covenanted Civil Service, but we know of instances in which members of that service who have been found to be in pecuniary embarrassments of this kind have been degraded or relieved of offices of trust We should like to know if Mr Beames ever communicated the nature of his pecuniary transactions with natives of the country to the Government he has been serving We only trust that the Government is in full possession of the facts If not, the present Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal owes a duty to himself, to the rest of the members

of the Covenanted Civil Service and to the public to make a strict enquiry into the truth or otherwise of the statements we publish today For, according to our commonsense view of the things we do not see any difference between the act of the Hon ble Mr Sullivan for which he was expelled from the service and that of Mr Beames"

Nor was this all After arming himself with documentary evidence, Shishir Kumar pursued the subject in the columns of the *Patrika* for three months until the Government of Lord Dufferin was obliged to make careful enquiries into the allegations, and both he and the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Steuart Bayley, were finally convinced of their correctness Mr Beames was removed from the Board of Revenue and the following censure on him was passed by the Government

"His Excellency in Council has further come with great regret, to the conclusion that the period of Mr Beames's present officiating appointment in the Board of Revenue must be at once terminated and that he should be transferred to a suitable appointment within the jurisdiction of which no native creditor of his resides or has an estate or commercial establishment'

No vindictive spirit had actuated Shishir Kumar to bring disgrace upon Mr Beames because it was not Mr Beames alone who was guilty of this corrupt practice Other civilian officers too were, in those days in the habit of borrowing from well to-do Indians in flagrant violation of one of the 'Rules of Conduct of Government Officials' which is still in force, and this practice had to be exposed The *Englishman* and the *Pioneer* sought unsuccessfully to defend Mr Beames, and the former tried to incite him to bring a criminal case against Shishir Kumar The *Dacca Gazette* (edited by a European) had the following comment on these efforts

"The great oracle of Hare Street seems to think that if the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* is mulcted of a sum of two or three thousand rupees and be made to rot for some weeks in a jail all the troubles would cease We can only pity the man for his utter ignorance of the resources of the *Amrita Bazar* and the spring from which it draws its life-blood We would ask the *Englishman* and its followers to try the experiment once for all We would be no false prophet if we were to say here that as soon as the news spreads throughout the country that the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar* is in trouble the whole country from Peshawar to Assam and from the Himalyas to Cape Comorin will rise as one man to help him and send forth a growl that will shake the throne of the Queen mother and make her look attentively to the affairs of India. Why,—such a course of action if followed up at all, will only tend to strengthen the cause which they propose to smother by all means'

Soon after this exposure and humiliation, Mr Beames left the country on furlough and never returned

Mr H Luson, the Subdivisional Magistrate of Meherpur, had flogged fifty inoffensive fishermen for catching fish in a large, open, water-logged area without definite boundaries within a zemindari This practice was a very common one in the rural areas and nobody took exception to it The brutal treatment meted out to these ignorant village folk by the officer in question was brought to the notice of Government by Shishir Kumar Another officer had kept a helpless village woman in his house by force with an evil purpose and Shishir Kumar revealed the man's wickedness in the *Patrika*

These are only a few of the many instances in which he exposed the doings of officials, never without a diligent enquiry, always without any personal motive and wholly regardless of personal risks Referring to the dangers and difficulties of criticizing the Government in Shishir Kumar's time, Lokmanya Tilak said in 1917

> "It is a very difficult task now to criticize the Government,—it was more so in those days and not only biting sarcasm but great resourcefulness, great courage, great insight and large sympathy was required to make honest journalism a success in the land Shishir Babu had these qualities in abundance The authorities feared him They could not raise their finger to crush him Sir Ashley Eden had wanted to strike at him but could not What was it due to? It was not due to legal or any other protection,—it was due to the character of the man which was his only protection Sir Ashley feared not so much the writing of the man but the character of the man who would persist in writing such things so long as the injustice was not removed"

The Indian League was organized to rouse mass consciousness As Shishir Kumar could not give it the necessary supervision on account of ill health and as the right type of workers to replace him could not be found, it had, as already stated, a short existence He then organized the Indian Union with the active support of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Sir Lakshmeswar Singh Bahadur, who, on attaining his majority and assuming direct charge of his estate from Court of Wards management, came and met Shishir Kumar in Calcutta and expressed a keen desire to do some useful work for the country Shishir Kumar did not choose to hold any office in this new organization, for it was always his way to shun the limelight and work quietly from behind The Maharaja was made the President of the Union and Mr W C Bonnerjee its Secretary When the latter was appointed Standing Counsel of the Calcutta High Court, the Secretaryship devolved on Dr Trailakhya Nath Mitra

But, unfortunately, the Doctor would neither apply himself sufficiently to the day to-day work of the Union nor would allow other members the scope to work whole heartedly The members were dispirited and the Union too, like the League, died out before long It was then that Shishir Kumar conceived of another organization which came to be known as the Indian Relief Society with Hirendra Nath Datta, Solicitor, as its Secretary He had felt that instead of agitating for such objects as self government, simultaneous Civil Service examination and the separation of the Executive from the Judicial, through Associations like the Indian League the Indian Union, or the Indian Association of Surendra Nath Banerji, more good could be done to the country if individual cases of failure of justice and instances of official vagaries and acts of oppression and flagrant misbehaviour by the Europeans in this country, official or non official, were brought to the notice of the House of Commons With this end in view, the Indian Political Agency was established in England and William Digby acted as its director in the same way as Sir William Wedderburn did for the British Congress Committee The function of the Indian Relief Society was to collect instances of despotism, nepotism and oppression through agencies in the mofussil, to prepare each case in all detail after sifting enquiry, and to report them to the Indian Political Agency for necessary agitation in Parliament It is worth while quoting the following passage from the first Report of the Indian Relief Society to show in what spirit it was conceived and Shishir Kumar s attitude towards the English people who governed the country

> "It was formed with the advice of a Hindu sage, who delivered himself thus 'The English people are always in a penitent mood for having taken away your liberty They, however, mean you well the interest of the large majority of Englishmen lies in governing you well Let them know your wants press your claims ceaselessly Educated under constitutional principles, they cannot resist persistent agitation Select for your works only those who are willing to labour without any reward Make one essential condition of membership — self effacement Allow no member to thrust forward, expel him who is vain and hankers after prominence Impart vitality to your people by your own activity Stick to truth and God will bless your labours'

W S Caine succeeded William Digby as the Indian Relief Society's Agent in England when the latter resigned because of his hands being too full with other matters As desired by Mr Caine, the Indian Relief Society came to be amalgamated with the Anglo Indian Temperance Association of which he was the guiding spirit A brief account of the many useful works taken up by the Indian Relief Society may be given here

The Baladhan murder case — Four men of the Assam tea gardens were sentenced to death and three to transportation for life on a charge of having murdered one of the planters The accused had no funds for an appeal to the High Court Their pleader approached the Relief Society for help and the society after going through the papers of the Sessions trial, engaged a Counsel who filed an appeal to the High Court which resulted in the acquittal of all the seven accused The High Court severely criticized the manner in which the proceedings were conducted in the courts of the Magistrate and the Sessions Judge This case of maladministration of justice by the lower judiciary was brought to the notice of Parliament by Mr Caine

Mr Beatson Bell — When Mr Beatson Bell, Magistrate of Khulna, was touring in the mofussil, he assaulted a zemindar's *gomasta* for failing to give him a glass of milk The incident was brought to the notice of Sir Charles Elliott, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, who, instead of censuring Mr Beatson Bell for losing his temper, supported his action on the plea that he had ridden a long distance on a hot day and was thirsty and the *gomasta's* failure to give him the milk had caused grave provocation The Relief Society took it up to the Government of India who passed a censure on Mr Beatson Bell. Though a petty instance, it is illustrative of the alertness of the Society to all acts of official high handedness and of Shishir Kumar's skill in organizing measures of relief

"No conviction, no promotion' — The impression had taken hold of the subordinate magistrates that their prospects of promotion depended largely on the increase in the percentage of convictions in cases tried by them This naturally led to failure of justice except in cases where the trying magistrate was an exceptionally conscientious officer Periodic returns showing convictions and acquittals were called for by the District Magistrates, and the latter, in reviewing the returns commented unfavourably on increases in the number of acquittals and mentioned it in the confidential reports in respect of the magistrates concerned A further ground for the growth of this impression was that Sir Charles Elliott, Lieutenant Governor, who toured extensively in the mofussil, often took notes of the percentages of convictions and acquittals from the subordinate magistrates' files A district judge brought this to the notice of the High Court which deprecated the Executive Government's practice of interfering, directly or indirectly, with the lower judiciary The Executive Government took exception to it and there was a bitter controversy between the High Court and the Government in the course of which the latter tried to arrogate to itself a status superior to that of the High Court The Relief Society brought all this to the notice of the Secretary of State through a Member of Parliament, and the Secretary of State set things right by according his full support to the position taken up by the High Court

Prison Reforms — Conditions of the prisons of those days were unusually distressing and Shishir Kumar wrote a series of articles censuring the Government for the miseries suffered by the prisoners He proved from Government reports that one convict out of every ten died within the prison walls and he considered it a fair inference that the condition of the rest was far from satisfactory At the instance of Shishir Kumar, the Indian Relief Society made detailed enquiries into the causes of prison mortality and published a brochure on the subject, copies of which were forwarded to the Howard Association of England The Secretary of the Association sent a copy to the Secretary of State, requesting him to make enquiries into the allegations Lord Kimberley forwarded it to the Government of Bengal which appointed a Committee of Enquiry with the Hon ble *D R Lyall*, Senior Member of the Board of Revenue as its President The Committee appointed Hirendra Nath Datta and Motilal Ghosh as jail visitors to furnish them with first hand information after personal inspection of the jails Their visit to the Calcutta Presidency Jail was interesting When they arrived there, the Superintendent, Mr Donaldson, received them at the jail gate and took them inside They found that though there were over a thousand inmates in the jail, not a single human voice was to be heard The only sound which reached them was caused by the different kinds of work which were going on No word escaped the convicts' lips Motilal enquired of Mr Donaldson if the prisoners were dumb The Superintendent replied ' No, but to keep so many convicts under control, we have to be strict in our discipline and it is against the rules for one prisoner to speak to another except in connection with the work or for very urgent reasons That is why you find them all so quiet "

The visitors proceeded on their round They saw that a convict was standing with joined palms as if he sought the Superintendent s leave to say something In reply to Motilal s enquiry, Mr Donaldson informed him that the man was seeking to invoke pity because whipping order had been passed on him and the order was going to be executed presently

Motilal He is to be flogged for what offence?

Mr Donaldson He is a very intractable fellow His outturn of work is never upto the mark

Motilal (to the convict) Why do you not give your full outturn?

Convict *Dharmâvatâr*! I work as hard as I can to reach the prescribed standard, but often such works are given to me as are beyond my capacity, and naturally my output is less For this offence I have been flogged before and I am going to be flogged again

Motilal Mr Donaldson, you say he is intractable and apparently you have failed to correct him by flogging I believe, a perverse man can be reformed more by kind rather than harsh treatment.

The happy result of this conversation was that the sentence of flogging in this case was remitted

The Superintendent took the visitors to the kitchen yard, where they found fine rice, the best of *dal* and vegetables and a smell of savoury cooking in the air Mr Donaldson took some cooked *dal* and putting it into his mouth exclaimed "Delicious!" Motilal and Hirendra Nath exchanged meaning glances and could hardly suppress a smile Mr Donaldson tried to impress upon them that their notion that the jail diet was bad was an erroneous one He asked them to make a note in the Visitors' Book that it was not so Motilal told the Superintendent that the latter had somewhat overdone the show which was obviously staged for their edification and that he was not convinced that it was the kind of food the convicts got ordinarily

As a result of Motilal Ghosh's evidence before the Prisons Committee, considerable improvement in the jail diet, latrine arrangements and other matters was effected The hours of work were also reduced

Shishir Kumar had original ideas on crimes and their causes From his studies in Vaishnavism, he had come to the conclusion that even the vilest of sinners could be reclaimed from the evil ways of life He felt that crimes could be checked and criminals reformed by devoting the labour and money which were spent on arresting convicting and punishing the criminals, to the moral education of the people "Our heart aches', he wrote, "for the unfortunate children of the earth, made so by ignorance, base surroundings and stern necessity, and society being blind to its highest interests We cannot find it in our soul to condemn anyone, to blame anyone, but sympathizing with all, even the most hardened criminal, we feel it our duty to press their claims for education and kindness, upon reformers and philanthropists everywhere ' He did not indeed ask for immediate abolition of all punishments, but trusted that in the fulness of time and with the growth of the social instinct, prison reformers would be able to achieve their ends But he favoured the immediate repeal of the death penalty

Punishment, Shishir Kumar held, had three objects reformation of the criminal, deterring others from crimes, and making reparations for the damages done by the criminal He could not conceive that revenge was an

object of punishment He tried to show that none of the three objects was fulfilled by the award of death sentence If a criminal was hanged, his reform was out of the question As for producing a deterrent effect upon others, Shishir Kumar's view was that those who committed the most heinous crimes, did so under a temporary derangement of their senses and fear of death found no place in their mind at that time As for the third object, taking the life of the murderer was no compensation to the living members of the victim's family, except in the way of revenge which conduced to nobody's good He showed from statistics that crimes had not increased in countries where capital punishment had been abolished Death sentence, he contended, could not, legally speaking, be passed by a Government whose function was to protect the life and property of the people in its charge Shishir Kumar's Vaishnava instincts recoiled at the thought of what he conceived was nothing but legalized murder.

By this time the *Patrika* had been converted from a weekly to a daily newspaper Shishir Kumar and his brothers had felt the urge for this change from some time past, but want of funds had hitherto made this impracticable It was the agitation over the Age of Consent Bill of Lord Lansdowne's Government which brought it about Orthodox opinion throughout the country ranged itself against the Bill prohibiting as it did, consummation of marriage until the wife was at least twelve years old, on the ground that it constituted an unwarranted interference with religious customs Mass meetings were held in Calcutta, protesting against the measure, the biggest one being on the Maidan attended by over a lac of people of all sects,—Hindus, Musalmans, Sikhs, Jains and others The *Bangabasi*, which expressed the people's point of view in very forceful language, was prosecuted The opponents of the Bill keenly felt the need of a daily newspaper conducted by an Indian The only Indian paper of importance which then existed was the *Indian Mirror*, which had been already converted into a daily, edited by Narendra Nath Sen, who was affiliated to the Brahmo Church, and it gave its support to the Bill Shishir Kumar and Motilal, whose organizing abilities had come to be well known, were approached by some of the leading public men with the suggestion that they should come forward to fill the want In response to this request and the wishes of the general public, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was converted within a week from a weekly into a daily newspaper.

The first issue of the daily edition appeared on the 19th February 1891, and it started on its career of daily service not a day too soon, for matters of serious import were moving the country from one end to the other about this time *A terrible famine swept over Bombay carrying away thousands,*

followed by an epidemic attack of bubonic plague People fled from the city in panic, more from the fear of the reckless Government measures to check the disease than of the disease itself The treatment meted out in the segregation camps, particularly to the women folk, caused considerable resentment Shishir Kumar attacked the plague policy of Government with his accustomed zeal, ably assisted by Motilal Ghosh Government lost its balance and took drastic measures to stifle criticism Lokmanya Tilak was prosecuted for publishing an article in the *Kesari* bitterly criticizing the plague measures of Government Shishir Kumar and Motilal who were deeply attached to him raised funds in Calcutta for his defence Tilak was convicted and sentenced by a British judge to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment, with the aid of nine jurors of whom three only were Indians, knowing Marathi, — the language in which the article was written,— and the rest were Britishers who did not understand a word of that language The conviction was condemned by all sections of the press in India as unfair, unjust and vindictive and spread further discontent in the country

Then came the Partition of Bengal, in the year 1905, a measure conceived by Lord Curzon, ultra Tory Viceroy of India, for the purpose of breaking the solidarity of the province which was taking the leading part in all political agitations in the country The whole of Bengal rose as one man against this mischievous measure and Indian newspapers were unanimous in their protests against it Lord Curzon paid no heed to the movement but coolly dubbed the partition as a 'settled fact' Shishir Kumar had by this time relegated all editorial responsibility of the *Patrika* to Motilal and worked only from behind, lending inspiration to the younger brother, and devoted himself almost exclusively to religious meditations and to the writing of his devotional books A vigorous campaign was carried on against the proposed measure through the columns of the *Patrika* as also of other newspapers, notably the *Bengalee*, edited by the famous orator, Surendra Nath Banerji The agitation, which came to be known as the 'Swadeshi Movement', gradually took a more serious turn and led to the birth of a revolutionary movement in Bengal Lord Curzon was so upset by the agitation that not content with taking all steps to stifle the national movement, he indulged in unseemly abusing In his speech as Chancellor, at a Covocation meeting of the Calcutta University, he made a sweeping attack on the Bengalis for what he described was their "love for vile flattery and disregard for truth", and claimed that "the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception" Two days later, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* published the following extract from Lord Curzon's book, *Problem of the Far East* which dealt with the author's visit to Japan.

"Before proceeding to the royal audience, I enjoyed an interview with the Korean Foreign Office I remember some of his (the Foreign Office President's) questions and answers Having been particularly warned not to admit to him that I was only thirty three years old, an age to which no respect attaches in Korea, when he put to me the straight question (invariably the first in an Oriental dialogue), 'How old are you?', I unhesitatingly responded 'Forty' 'Dear me', he said, 'you look very young for that How do you account for it?' 'By the fact', I replied that I have been travelling for a month in the superb climate of His Majesty s dominions' Finally he said to me, 'I presume you are a near relative of Her Majesty the Queen of England' 'No', I replied, 'I am not But observing the look of disgust that passed over his countenance, I was fain to add, 'I am however as yet an unmarried man,' with which unscrupulous suggestion I completely regained the old gentleman's favour"

It is significant that this latter passage, containing the interview of Lord Curzon with the President of the Korean Foreign Office was omitted from the subsequent editions of the book

CHAPTER V

MONOGRAPHS

EVEN when Shishir Kumar was thus fighting political battles, his pen was engaged in a number of other activities of different kinds Social evils, physical sufferings of his fellow beings, corruption in the civic administration of Calcutta, the development of the Bengali stage,—all these came for his attention He had already written, as noted before, a brochure on snake bites and their treatment We shall now make brief references to certain other booklets

Naiso Rupia (Nine Hundred Rupees) was a social drama exposing the evil practice of extorting heavy prices, prevailing amongst *Kulin* (high-caste) Brahmins, for giving away their daughters in marriage The *Bajarer Lada* or 'Battle over a Market' was a political skit designed to expose the vagaries and high handedness of Steuart Hogg, the then Chairman of the Calcutta Municipality and Police Commissioner of Calcutta, in trying to establish the market, known at first as Sir Steuart Hogg Market and later on, as the Calcutta Municipal Market To achieve this purpose, he had to break up a market at Dharamtala owned by Hira Lal Seal one of the millionaires of Calcutta In pursuing this end, Sir Steuart made extensive use of his influence and powers and freely mis spent the ratepayers' money A few extracts from the play will be found amusing and revealing Sir Steuart is seen seated in his office and a clerk is rendering accounts of the expenditure incurred in establishing the new market

Clerk Paid to Shanti Ram Mali Rs 2

Hogg Why?

Clerk He would sell *baigans* (brinjals) in the new market

Hogg Rs 2 for selling *baigans*? What a waste! The ratepayers' money is my heart s blood I am the trustee of the ratepayers' money For selling *baigans*—Rs 2? It is a shame!

Clerk: How can there be a market without a supply of *baigans* which are so much in demand as a common vegetable?

Hogg: But Europeans do not care for *baigans*.

Clerk: I see Your Honour's point. Next, carriage hire,— Rs. 350.

Hogg: What carriage hire?

Clerk: To enable *Sahiblog* to come to the new market.

Hogg: That's quite all right.

Clerk: Rs. 430 paid for sweetmeats.

Hogg: Sweetmeats! For what purpose?

Clerk: To give away as presents to the *Sahiblogs* who would come there.

Hogg: I see! They were given to the *Sahiblogs*, were they?

Clerk: To them alone.

Hogg: Quite right too.

The skit was played on the stage of the National Theatre and was enthusiastically received. *Nimai Sannyas* was a drama of which the theme was the *sannyas* or initiation of Nimai (Lord Gouranga of Nadia) into the order of the Sannyasin, implying renunciation of the world, whereafter he came to be known as Sri-Krishna Chaitanya or Chaitanya Deva. The play gives a moving description of the ceremony and the feelings of the vast concourse of people who were struck with sorrow at the sight of their beloved 'Nimai Pundit', clad only in a loin-piece, with his head shorn of its beautiful locks and the Sannyasin's begging bowl in his hands.

Narottam Charit depicts the life of Narottam Das, afterwards known as Narottam Thakur, son of Krishnananda Datta of the village of Khetri in Rampur Boalia (District Burdwan). The latter was a big jagirdar under one of the Mohammedan chiefs and was locally known as the Raja of Khetri. In the same village lived an old Brahmin named Krishnadas, a contemporary of Sri Gouranga who had by this time made his exit from this world. Narottam heard from Krishnadas from day to day all about the *Avatar* of Nadia, his renunciation of the world and his *leelas*, and was instinctively drawn to him. He was seized by a passionate love with all the symptoms of *purvarag* (first flame of love), saw visions of Sri Gouranga and his *bhaktas* and was often in a trance. The Musalman Chief, having heard of these happenings about Narottam, a boy of 16 years, expressed a desire to see him and sent his outriders to bring him. Krishnananda could not disregard the Chief's orders and sent Narottam accompanied by a number of his trusted men. Narottam departed in their company one morning in the month of *Kartic* with unfeigned

pleasure, secretly bidding farewell to his parents, his home, and his earthly possessions Before he had proceeded very far, he slipped out of the company of his attendants and disappeared The news reached Krishnananda who sent out a search party and the latter found him lying under a tree half famished and fatigued by the unaccustomed privations of a journey on foot through long distances and dense jungles But the men of Raja Krishnananda failed to bring Narottam back and the young boy went his way The author compares Narottam's power of resistance to the superhuman force of the Hindu woman marching to the funeral pyre of her husband determined to die a *sattee* followed by hundreds of her friends and relations trying to dissuade her

Narottam reached Mathura after a tiring and hazardous journey of many months, stopping in his stride at Benares and Prayag (Allahabad), hallowed by the memories of Sri Gouranga Sri Jiva Goswami, one of those *bhaktas* who had taken their abode in Vrindaban at the behest of their lord saw in a dream a vision of Narottam resting at Visramghat (in Mathura) and sent a messenger to bring him to Vrindaban Narottam went and received his initiation there from Loknath Goswami after a great deal of *sadhana* The rest of his life reads like a romance, and it is beyond the scope of this book to give a fuller account of this consecrated life of piety and devotion

In dedicating this little book to his departed father, Shishir Kumar wrote "Foolish man, blinded by his Godlessness, is ever bewailing his lot and beating his breast in a frenzy of earthly afflictions You know, father, that this thought breaks my heart But I have not the virtue nor the quality to reclaim him by my own teachings That is why I conceived the idea of depicting the lives of saints, a perusal of which might cause in him an awakening There is no sorrow for one who has once tasted the nectar from the lotus feet of the Lord That is why I have written this life of Sri Narottam Thakur I shall feel myself rewarded, if on its perusal even one soul is drawn to His feet"

Another life-sketch he wrote was that of Prakashananda Saraswati and incidentally that of his nephew, Gopal Bhatta* Though born with the instinct of love and devotion, Prakashananda was endowed with a strong intellect, and as he rose to become a great scholar, he followed the path of pure reason and eventually renouncing the world, he became a follower of Shankaracharya and established himself at Benares as one of the foremost leaders of the Vedanta School. On the other hand, his nephew Gopal Bhatta, though he had his early teachings from his uncle had been drawn to Sri

* An ancestor of the late Madhu Sudan Goswami Sarbabhauma and his son Srikrishna-Chaitanya Goswami one of the *Sevaits* of Sri Sri Radha Ramanji of Vrindaban

Gouranga and the path of devotion In both the lives, however, there was evidence of the part which *bhakti* plays on the human heart in its conquest of reason When the Saraswati was holding his sway in Benares, Sri Gouranga and his followers were in Nilâchal (Puri) flooding the country with their *sankirtans* Prakashananda, who was already angry with the latter on account of his nephew Gopal Bhatta's conversion, became very jealous of Sri Gouranga's hold on the people Unable to contain himself, he sent a derisive note to Sri Gouranga, saying that he was a fool to be wasting his time at Nilâchal, while the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself, was dispensing salvation to mankind in Kâshidham (Benares) He received a suitable reply, but the finale of this drama was enacted at a meeting of the two protagonists in Benares when the great Saraswati was completely won over by Sri Gouranga and the force of *bhakti* Shishir Kumar describes how Prakashananda fell at the feet of the Lord and implored:

Alas for me, my lord,—
What hast thou done!
What plight is this for me!
Like a thief in the night,
Thou came with silent steps
And *stole my heart*,
And drugged my senses with an opiate
That made me mad,
And now, deserting me, thou goest thy way!

Proud of my reasonings and my lore,
Unshakable as the mountains old,
Hard and relentless as the stones,
No smile had lit my face,
So stern I was and grave

——— And now?
Lost to all sense of shame,
Fickle and frolicsome as a babe,—
I am dancing to the tune of thy play!

I had cut all worldly ties,
And renouncing all things earthly,
Taken a Sannyasin's bowl
And was freed, I thought, of the chains
That bound the common herd,
Beyond the tears and smiles of love
And thou camest with thy smiling snare,
Wherein I was caught!

This was the profound Prakashananda, reborn as the love bound Prabodhananda

And what about the author of his life, Shishir Kumar? He had written the following in course of an article in the *Vishnupriya Patrika* shortly after

the death of Hemanta Kumar "My *Mejdada* (Hemanta Kumar) came to see me at Hanshkhali He had more than one advantage over me, for the *Bhakti* path had been clearly enunciated and laid bare by Sri Gouranga Even the blind could walk on it So he was going through such books as the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and others of their class most attentively But I was in a quandary Where was the guru to guide me on the path of reason? I had told him that his Gouranga was very close to my heart but I could not agree with all his doctrines The religion he preached was more for women and the weak minded than for the man with strong intellect and reasoning faculties It would serve no purpose shedding tears like women We two had long discussions over the question whether the path of reason or that of *bhakti* was the higher I was strongly for the former, while *Mejdada* was as strongly for the latter He was always defeated by my logic But even so I felt in my heart that he had made some real advance in spirituality and was ahead of me in that sphere I even grieved that I was not made like him But I was too proud to admit it I kept it concealed in my heart and began to feel that Sri Gouranga's religion was the best Presently, I heard my brother humming a tune to himself I could not follow all the words, but the few I could catch and their underlying pathos softened my heart Later, I learnt the song which went like this, depicting Sri Gouranga in a trance, possessed by the spirit of Sri Radha·

'Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna —
Ah me! Where's my Krishna gone?'—
That was all which Gour did mutter,
As, tears streaming from his eyes
On the earth he senseless falls,
Besmeared with dust
For a trice, as sense returns,
In agony's grip he cries
'My Krishna is gone!
Even now he was here!
And now into hiding gone,
After stealing my heart
Where is my Krishna?
Where is he gone?'

"The next day my brother left for home, not without leaving behind something for me His mournful tune had gone deep into my heart On reaching home, he wrote that he had come to me for some peace and comfort but I had given him none I felt pained I felt that he had accused me justly I pondered over it all I thought that as Sri Gouranga and my brother were both dear to me, I should, for the sake of both, know more of the *leelas* of Gour of which I had some taste already and they had tasted sweet

I wrote at once to Calcutta for a copy of *Chaitanya Bhagavata* The book came in due course I opened the packet with trembling fingers The mere touch of the book sent a thrill of joy through my whole system I read it little by little It was so sweet that I could not swallow much at a time I wrote to my brother that when he came next, I would remove the sorrow he had felt on his previous visit The reply to it came quite soon Its purport was this Shishir, some god whom I did not know entered my heart and said 'Your younger brother, Shishir, is marked out as a faithful servant of Sri Gouranga The lord would accomplish some of his objects through him' On reading this, I fainted On regaining consciousness, I began to weep My brother had often written to me under some inspiration and I had a faith in such inspired messages from him But again, I mused 'What means this game of a sportive God? Could He find no worthier agent to preach His love to man? Hard hearted, harsh and drowned in politics I had grown into a godless rationalist, well nigh an atheist, as a result of the English education I had received' Again I thought that God's ways were inscrutable, that nothing was impossible for Him, He gives vision to the born blind, He makes the lame and crippled leap and dance He seems to have chosen the meanest of His creatures to prove His omnipotence and His grace Was it to prepare me for this task that He was giving me a foretaste of His love through *Chaitanya Bhagavata* and other books on the *leelas* of Sri Gouranga?'

Shishir Kumar was not an erudite scholar like Prakashananda, versed in the Vedas and ancient scriptures It was small wonder, therefore, that he should be conquered by the doctrines of love, and renouncing rationalism, plunge himself, as though by divine commandment, into the none too easy task of delineating the life and *leelas* of Sri Gouranga for the benefit principally of the common folk who failed to enter fully into the learned texts of *Chaitanya Bhagavata, Chaitanya Charitamrita, Chaitanya Mangal* and other similar works of the Goswamis And he wrote with his pen dipped in that liquid love which wells up from a purified heart That is why *Amiya Nimai Charit* was written in a language which seemed to come straight from the heart And therein has been the secret of its success It is against the above mental background that the six precious volumes of that book should be read They constituted the last work of his life,—literally, his last days' work, for even on the morning of his death, he was engaged in the correction of the proofs of the last forme of the last volume, and on finishing and handing it to his people, he said "My work is finished today"

We shall review this work in a subsequent chapter and at some length, as it gives a true insight into the life and character of this great son of India

CHAPTER VI

EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

IT has been said in Chapter IV that Shishir Kumar had relegated the charge of the *Patrika* to his worthy brother-disciple Motilal, and had taken to a life of divine meditation No particular year marked this transition From the earliest years of his life, love of God and an intense faith in His goodness had a predominant place in his heart If he fought political battles, it was because of his love for man His miseries in this world whether self inflicted or as a result of political bondage always moved him Truly did Dr S K Mullick, speaking at his first death anniversary meeting, say that he had known saints and he had seen warriors but he had never known or seen a saint warrior until he had come in contact with Shishir Kumar His bitterest comments on the bureaucracy were merely the expression of a poignant grief And even after his retirement, though he gave more of himself to his Maker than to matters mundane, he was at no time oblivious of his surroundings Even a few moments before his death, when he realized that the end of life's drama was near, he made anxious enquiries if all inmates of the house had taken their meals For, he knew that if they had not already done so, the upheaval caused by his death would drive all thoughts of food or drink from the house

His health had failed He wished to live a few more years to serve God and man He left for his quiet country retreat at Deoghar and spent the greater part of the last eight or ten years of his life in its solitude He was one of the earliest settlers in that little subdivisional town Here he felt himself in closer communion with Nature and saw the soft touch of God's fingers in the green of the surrounding woods and in the varied colours on the petals of flowers, and he heard His music in the cry of the beetle and the screeching of the owl, in the carol of birds and in the growl of warring cats And it was here that the germ of his immortal lyric *Kalachand-Gita* sprouted

at the sight of a little flower, dyed in Nature's loveliest hue, on the summit of a lonely hill Well could the poet have said that "to him the meanest flower that bloomed brought thoughts too deep for tears" But of this in a subsequent chapter

The story of his life will be incomplete without an account of his life at Deoghar A very correct picture of it is furnished by Sj Hari Nath Ghosh and published as one of the Appendices to the *Life of Shishir Kumar* (in Bengali) by Anath Nath Bose, and we could not do better than incorporate a few extracts from it *verbatim*, in English 'When I first met Shishir Kumar, I was in the third year class of the Calcutta Metropolitan Institution Even as a little boy, I had heard that he was an extraordinary man My father in-law was at one time stationed at Deoghar During a Puja vacation, when I was paying a visit to him, I was introduced by him to Shishir Kumar who was very affectionate to my father in law It was nearly evening when we met I found that he was running about like a boy on the open meadow in front of his house I made my *pranam* to him and took the dust of his feet When he had heard what I was doing, he put this question 'You are going up for the B A, that is alright But what subjects have you taken up?' I answered that I had taken Philosophy and Sanskrit It seemed that he felt rather disappointed He said 'You have not taken Mathematics? Can our intellect have the proper development without a training in Mathematics?' He turned to a gentleman who was standing by and said 'Look here, if our boys are to profit by their education, they must be taught Mathematics and Music I have been trying to impress this point on our educationists for many years but they pay no attention to it What matters it if you express your thoughts in good or indifferent English? Without a mathematical bend in your mind, you can neither speak nor write with precision' Then he turned to me and said 'I have heard from your father in law, that you are suffering from head trouble Do not drug yourself with a lot of medicines Take walks with me for a few days and you will be alright I get up very early in the morning and have my walk I will take you along with me tomorrow morning' And true to his word, he was at my door before sunrise next morning shouting for me I hastened out and he said 'Let us go for a walk' Before I knew it, he had caught hold of my hand and started It was not so much walking as running, and he kept dragging me along with him He said 'Walking is a good exercise and so is running but do not walk or run so fast as to feel out of breath If you do it properly, you can go two or three miles without feeling knocked up On the contrary, you will feel a fresh life in you' We walked or ran as he chose, sometimes over roads and sometimes across country After nearly an hour of this ramble, we returned home

"He was very familiar with the *kisans* of the neighbouring villages If he met any of them in the course of his daily walks, he would make detailed enquiries about their domestic affairs Sometimes he would go into their little homesteads sit down on a *charpoy* and get into intimate conversation, as if he was one of their own And they too trusted him as such and opened their hearts to him

"During my stay there I had come to know the daily routine of his life He would get up very early in the morning, light a fire, make his own tea, and take it Then he would run about for an hour or so, return home, and do some reading or writing He had his breakfast before 9 o'clock, and would then go out and pay visits to his neighbours His dress consisted of a small *dhoti*, a half sleeve *kurta*, a pair of slippers on his feet, and, of all things on earth, a big sola hat on his head On returning home, he would take a siesta for an hour and after that he would again be occupied in reading or writing At 4 o'clock, after taking some light refreshments, he would again go out for his exercise The evenings were spent in music, when some of the *littérateurs* of the day, Akshoy Chandra Sarkar, Haralal Roy and others would assemble at his place And when he sang his *kirtan* songs in the charming voice God had given him, the listeners were often moved to tears

"For a time I worked as his amanuensis, especially when he was writing his memorable work *Lord Gouranga* He was a wonderful man to work with Even if he happened to be interrupted in the course of his dictation by the unexpected visit of an intimate acquaintance, he would resume the sentence where he left off without asking for a cue And when he used to dictate *Lord Gouranga*, tears would often flow from his eyes and his voice would be choked I have since read that book in print, but I did not then feel half that pleasure as when I heard it from his lips

"In my little life I have not met another man of such versatile ability, wide and sympathetic outlook, long range vision and strength of character It is not for one such as I to describe him Rabindranath, speaking of Bankim Chandra, had said that it was not for him to describe the Rishi novelist The poet thought of little children who, after having a look at tall mountains, described their heights by raising their little arms and saying, 'as tall as this!' By what yard stick could I measure Shishir Kumar's greatness?"

It would have been clear from the earlier pages of this book that Shishir Kumar was brought up in a devotional atmosphere But what gave him a more forceful impetus to spiritual pursuit was the tragic death of a younger

brother, Hiralal, by suicide He gave an account of it many years later in the *Hindu Spiritual Magazine* which was published under his editorship.

> "We were eight brothers and devotedly loved one another One of our brothers suddenly died, and this had a tremendous effect upon the entire family Was it for this that God implanted love in the human breast? Was it for this that He gave life? The fact was, we were trained under religious principles, and had a strong faith in the existence and goodness of our Creator Indeed the brother who had died had committed suicide from morbid religious feelings He had imbibed Methodistical doctrines from the Brahmoism of those days which largely drew its instincts from Christian Methodism Our brother felt that he had committed sin and would commit more as he grew up and that his best course would be to put an end to his life For a few months he suffered from melancholia and then, one day, he hanged himself Our faith in God received a rude shock when the incident happened If God gave life and love to man and then destined man for annihilation, —if He implanted love in the human breast and destined man to suffer the severe pangs of bereavement, He must be the most cruel Being in existence Surely a man unless he were a monster, would never snatch a child from the bosom of its mother This God was doing constantly, was God more cruel than His creation, man? If there was survival and reunion after death it was alright, otherwise what was the use of living at all? Let the entire family put an end to their lives once for all, and put an end to their misery Thus the entire family felt in the anguish of their soul"

Such was the feeling in the family after Hiralal's death Just about this time, as stated by Shishir Kumar's worthy nephew and disciple Sj Mrinal Kanti Ghosh, in his book *Life Beyond Death* Basanta Kumar and his brothers had "heard of the means adopted in America to get into communication with the departed souls of men and even to carry on conversation with them *Having learnt that the ways and means were detailed in some books, Shishir* Kumar resolved to know all about them He was even ready to proceed to America if it was necessary for the purpose Coming to Calcutta he went to see the librarian of the Bengal Library (now the Imperial Library), the late Peary Chand Mitter, a man then well known in the city Peary Chand was greatly impressed with the earnestness of young Shishir Kumar He got him enlisted as a subscriber to the Library and supplied him with all the books on occult science that were available These books were of a practical character and contained instructions as how to hold 'circles' and invoke spirits In these books as also in the association of Peary Chand who himself had been a keen student of spiritualism, Shishir Kumar found his first impetus to spiritualism Returning home equipped with these precious volumes, Shishir Kumar made arrangements for forming a spiritual circle on American lines

A clean room was selected for the purpose Shortly before dusk, circling a round table sat the four brothers Basanta Kumar, Hemanta Kumar, Shishir Kumar and Motilal, and their mother and sisters, each touching the hand of the other sitting next on either side, thus forming a complete unbroken circle The door of the room was bolted from within, to ensure against intrusion into the room during the sitting" The result at this first sitting was disappointing They sat in the 'circle' again next evening with a similar result But they persisted in their efforts and at the third evening s sitting, Motilal, who was one of the sitters, showed hysterical symptoms He was found breathing heavily, his hands were trembling, and he broke into convulsive sobs They got nervous over his condition and threw open the doors and windows and sprinkled water on his face and fanned him till he was brought back to his senses He was then asked how he had felt in his state of trance He replied "First there came over me a feeling of stupor, which was followed by a sort of indefinable excitement Then gradually I began to lose all control over my body and mind Some unknown force seemed to throw its arms round my neck and cried plaintively, and I too wept Then the force essayed to speak but could not" He could not explain the nature of the force, nor what it had tried to say What happened at the fourth day's seance is best described by the author of the book mentioned above

> 'Motilal got into trance again and it looked as if he wanted to write something A pencil was then put between the fingers of his trembling hand and a sheet of paper placed before him At first he had some difficulty in holding the pencil, but after several efforts he succeeded, and immediately started scribbling vigorously After several sheets of paper had been spoilt and the pencil blunted, he could write the name of Hiralal indistinctly At the sight of Hiralal's name their sorrow broke loose afresh and they shed tears The pencil now slipped off Motilal s fingers, and in a state of complete trance he threw his arms round his mother's neck weeping and gasped out, 'Mother, I am Hiralal' and sobbed Motilal s eyes were then closed and he was in a state of semiconsciousness But the voice in which he uttered those words was unmistakably Hiralal s and everybody felt it so The very thought that Hiralal lived overwhelmed them with joy As Motilal next began wiping the tears from their eyes, they were practically convinced that Hiralal really lived and that it was he who was thus consoling them personally In this thought they found great relief"

They continued sitting in those home 'circles' every evening, but Shishir Kumar himself never developed into a good medium On the other hand his youngest daughter Suhash Nayana proved to be an excellent one, and she came to be one of the regular sitters At her first sitting, the spirit of her stepmother took possession of her and she scribbled the following message, evidently meant for

Shishir Kumar: "When I was living here alone, I had a comparatively peaceful time True, I have got a companion now, but I cannot feel at ease as you are living there alone But this state of things will not continue long You will soon come over here and join us when we all three shall spend our days happily in singing hymns in praise of God As you are now feeling Kumadinee's absence more acutely, she comes to you frequently and I keep back Being pressed by her today I have accompanied her here" The next evening Suhash was possessed by another spirit which would not give out its name, until it was pressed to do so by Shishir Kumar, who asked 'Who are you?' The reply came in a very serious tone,—after some hesitation "I am your father I have come to give you a warning You would soon have to come here Prepare yourself for it"

Shishir Kumar How am I to prepare myself and pay more attention to Divinity?

Spirit Renounce *samsar*

Shishir Kumar Should I then go to Vrindaban?

Spirit No, surrender yourself to Sri Gouranga and give yourself up to His worship

Shishir Kumar I had thought, father, of seeking your forgiveness after my death when I came to you, for in your lifetime, I had not shown you sufficient regards

Spirit Do not seek my forgiveness, but God's Do you forget that for ten years before her death, your mother had whole-heartedly worshipped God, day and night? You are fortunate in having believed in Sri Gouranga and in being able to surrender yourself to Him Pray that you may be equally blessed when you come here I must be off now for this medium is unable to stand my force Why are you crying and giving me pain selfishly? Do not weep, you will have everything

Shishir Kumar Are you there with my brothers?

Spirit Your mother and myself are together here But over here, there is practically little difference between living together and living apart I am off now I can stay no more

In this way they had their sittings almost every evening and the spirits of many of the departed members of Shishir Kumar's family manifested themselves in the above manner Hemanta Kumar, who was Shishir Kumar's elder brother, and father of Sj Mrinal Kanti Ghosh, was another good medium He showed no outward change except that his right hand shook gently and a pencil being placed in it, the hand moved very fast and sheets of paper were rapidly

scribbled over, but there was nothing to show that he was writing under any super normal influence It is recorded by his son, Sj Mrinal Kanti, that "the conditions prevailing in after-life, as depicted in his automatic writings, have been found to be strangely similar to those described by the renowned William Stead in his writings purporting to have been dictated by the spirit of Miss Julia Several years later, the following facts culled from the automatic writings of Hemanta Kumar were published by Shishir Kumar in the *Hindu Spiritual Magazine*

> "Some spirits have written that it is not a figment of the brain to say, 'As you sow, so you reap' or that you have to expiate for every sin committed in this world As in this material world bodily diseases cause pain to the body, so for every sin committed here, mental anguish and pain are caused to the ethereal body after death At times, their sufferings are so acute that one shudders to think of them Those who shed their mortal bodies after leading immoral and evil lives, or after committing murder or any other serious crimes, become evil spirits after death They not only suffer terribly, but actually fear that there is no end to their sufferings, even hope refusing to come to them They roam alone uncared for and unsympathized They cannot pray to God, nay, some of them do not believe in His existence, and some believe firmly that they have become ghosts and can never improve and are bound to the earth for ever It has also been told that the higher spirits have a difficulty in communicating with such spirits in the lower state, and those who shew that they are suffering, are spirits who have made little or no progress in the other world
>
> "We are told that the condition of the earthbound spirits is more terrible They do not know their condition and never repent for their sins, but lead a tedious life of ennui and listlessness, every minute being the same to them Sometimes they possess the bodies of innocent souls and cause all sorts of atrocious acts and give them and others intense pain and anxiety It is under this plight they live, sometimes thousands of years, till some lucky circumstances lead them to the path of progress
>
> "Still more terrible is the condition of those who, instead of repenting for what they had done, glory in their sins and throw all the blame of their deeds upon God, some blaspheme horribly, and these spirits get lower and lower gradually and finally they become actually extinct and cease to exist"

It is beyond the scope and purpose of this book to write at any length on the revelations of the spirit world to Shishir Kumar and his family members Those who feel interested in the question, whether there is a life beyond death, should peruse Sj Mrinal Kanti's book bearing that title It constitutes an earnest endeavour to explore an unseen world and to bring solace to bereaved hearts But it would be interesting to note the pains Shishir

Kumar took to collect from contemporaneous men and literature all available information on this hitherto unexplored subject

During these researches into the occult world Shishir Kumar heard that Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott founders of the Theosophical Society in America, had arrived in India and were staying in Bombay with the object of starting a similar Society in this country He entered into correspondence with the Colonel at once and arrived in Bombay at an appointed date He found the Colonel waiting for him at the Bombay Railway Station Shishir Kumar had the impression that Colonel Olcott was the head of the Society, but on the way to the Colonel's house the latter informed him that it was Madame Blavatsky who held that place, and that Shishir Kumar should offer her the regard which was due to her Madame received him cordially and he was introduced to Mr Winbridge, an artist, and Mrs Bates, who had accompanied them from England Shishir Kumar lived with Colonel Olcott in one bungalow, while Madame lived in another which was adjacent to it

At this time, Shishir Kumar was a follower of the Brahmo faith, but he had not derived much comfort from it He was therefore spending his days in an earnest and sustained quest for truth His investigation into spiritualism seems to have prepared his mind for receiving and appreciating the hidden treasures which the ancient Hindu *Rishis* had left in the scriptures for the benefit of the children of Varatavarsha, and to have gradually led to his alienation from the Brahmo Church His contact with the founders of the Theosophical Society opened to him a wider vista of knowledge and went to build up his faith in Hinduism more strongly He spent three weeks in Bombay with the Colonel and Madame, and was greatly impressed by their kindly disposition and earnest search for truth Colonel Olcott told him that Madame Blavatsky had studied the *yoga* in America, that it was through *yogic* practices that the *Mahatmas* had acquired supernatural powers, and that it was under their behest that she had come to India to establish a Society to revive the *yogic* culture Shishir Kumar's curiosity was roused He asked the Colonel if the *Mahatmas*, through their occult powers could accomplish anything which was beyond the power of the ordinary man

Colonel Certainly, they can leave their physical frame and move from place to place in that state and can even mysteriously disappear from amidst a concourse of people

Shishir How can we believe it without personally witnessing such phenomenon? Can we not aspire to have a *darshan* of the *Mahatmas*?

Colonel If you wish to have their grace, you should first render your help to the mission which aims at bringing enlightenment to man through the practices of *yoga*, and to open the door of salvation to him

Shishir I'll apply myself to this work whether they bestow any favour on me or not, for it seems to me a way to attain truth, but during my stay here, Madame has not shown me any of her occult powers

Colonel Only privileged persons can witness them Madame cannot show you anything unless you enlist yourself as one of us after due initiation

Shishir If that is so, initiate me today

And under Madame Blavatsky's instructions the Colonel initiated him as a member of the Indian Theosophical Society He was probably the first member of that body in India

The Madame and the Colonel did not find Bombay a good field for the dissemination of Theosophy After a short while they came to Calcutta where they derived considerable assistance from Shishir Kumar in establishing Theosophical Societies in different parts of India This led to a closer affinity between them and Shishir Kumar, and they often stayed with him when visiting Calcutta

At first a Brahmo, then a spiritualist and thereafter a Theosophist Shishir Kumar had gradually received the seeds which later on blossomed into the religion of love, *making him one of the devoutest followers of Sri* Chaitanya Deva of Nadia, and one of the foremost exponents of his teachings at a time when they were being either forgotten or misunderstood We shall see in subsequent chapters how he consecrated himself to his Lord and tried to awaken in man a love which is boundless in its sweep and a taste of which makes the soul float, as it were, in a sea of bliss

CHAPTER VII

THE SEEDS SPROUT

IN the columns of his *Vishnupriya Patrika*, a monthly journal on Vaishnavism, Shishir Kumar has left an illuminating account of how from being an atheist or a Brahmo, he came to be a believer in the religion of love and a devout follower of Sri Chaitanya Deva who had preached it 400 years before It reads like the confessions of a penitent heretic and though somewhat long is worth a full reproduction for a proper appreciation of the conflicts through which a man truly anxious to reach Divinity, has to pass before achieving his wished for solace ' In writing 'Rai Unmadini' and describing the intoxication of Radha from Krishna's love, Krishna Kamal Goswami had composed some beautiful lines purporting to be Radha's own account of her state of frenzy in her quest after the Lord Accosting one of her *sakhis* (companions) she says 'How can I explain what my condition was then? When newborn love scratched my heart little discernment was in me Not behind nor ahead I looked, no loss nor gain did I count Full well I knew what was in store for me — in loving the cowherd boy, — to ramble from wood to wood and oft to encounter snakes and thorns and mire Too well I knew that when the flute would sound its call there was no tarrying to be, but away I was to run, leaving my hearth and home, regardless of the elders and the slur on my lineage, — and so on No one without God's grace can fully appreciate the surging passions that rule the heart when a soul, first smitten by His love starts in quest of Him At times I have felt it to some extent I cannot say why the Lord was pleased with me I had never truly given myself up to His worship, nor could I claim to have done anything to merit His favour I thought that the reason why He had made me taste of His love's sweetness was this· He selected me to proclaim His *leelas* to the world not because I was a pious man, but just because I was not Through His grace, the lame has learnt to leap and dance, and the blind has got back his sight I believe, the Lord thought that I was one of the meanest of His

creatures and so He wished that even through one like me, devoid of piety, He would show the world how potent was His love But to describe His *leelas*, one needed the requisite sense of appreciation to enable him to discharge his task That is perhaps why He let me have a partial taste of the *rasas*, generated in course of the quest, to qualify me for broadcasting His message When I lived for a time in the peaceful village of Hanshkhali on the bank of the little stream Churni, I sent for a copy of *Sri Chaitanya Bhagavata* from Calcutta It came by post, and I cannot describe the feeling by which I was overcome as I took the packet in my hands Opening it I was seized by a tremor and my hand began to shake It is true Sri Gouranga had always a loving place in my heart, but I had never suspected that I would be ever surrendering myself absolutely to His feet With a beating heart and trembling fingers I succeeded in opening the packet I opened the contents, and as I ran my eyes through them, they were blurred by tears For long I went through the index pages, unable to start reading the text However, after some efforts I began reading it, very slowly indeed, a little at a time A peculiar feeling of self-forgetfulness took possession of me, and I forgot my surroundings and my relations In a sense, I became perfectly indifferent to all things I had held dear in this world, even my nearest kith and kin I was always in a pensive mood but what I actually thought I did not myself know I disliked mixing with others, I lost even the desire for any conversation with them I lived alone absorbed in myself

"I began reading the book At the very outset, I found a lot of crying at the name of God A *bhakta* here shed his tears for Krishna; another there fainted on hearing his name, and so on I could not comprehend crying at the utterance of Krishna's name How could it be? Was there really anyone to be found these days, I asked myself, who cried when uttering His name? Would it ever be my good luck to meet such a person? Why should a man cry on taking His name? At one stage of my life, sometimes I used to cry myself on taking God's name But the kind of crying described in the *Bhagavata*, I felt, was different from it Then I used to pray: 'O my God! I am one of the greatest sinners Forgive me, my Father, and do not cast me into hell' As a child cries from the fear of some unseen bogy, I used to cry from the fear of sinfulness There was absolutely no element of any such fear in the crying on Krishna's name as narrated in the *Bhagavata*

"In this mood I used to pray that God might help me to meet someone who cried on taking Krishna's name I never hoped to be one such myself There was one Rukmini Gossain in Krishnagar who had once read the *Bhagavata* to me and given me intense joy With the help of my friend Sj Dwarka

Nath Sarkar, I got him to my place at Hanshkhali. Of course I felt very much gratified by his coming. But he started his conversation with some business topics. It did not please me, for I had begun to hate them as poison. I entreated him to tell me if he had come across any person who cried on taking Krishna's name. He said it was very difficult to meet one such, but he knew of a devout Vaishnava in a neighbouring village, who would begin to cry as soon as the name of Krishna entered his ears once or twice. I said to him, beseeching: 'Do kindly explain it to me clearly. Here I am, taking His name, but not one drop of tear comes out of my eyes.' The Vaishnava tried to explain: 'What happens with him is like this. If anyone goes to him he refers to Krishna as "My Krishna", "My own Krishna", "the Krishna I know", and so on, and at once begins to sob and cry.'

"This explanation did not make things any clearer. I thought of going to that neighbouring village where this person lived. But it did not come about, partly because I did not feel physically very fit in those days.

"I stood alone on the wide-stretched moor on the outskirts of Hanshkhali village and saw at a distance so many hamlets in which hundreds of men and women were living. Was there to be found not one amongst them who cried on taking Krishna's name on his lips? I went to the village mart one day, and saw hundreds of people busy buying and selling, far from anyone of them crying at Krishna's name. It was not even on anyone's lips. I saw an old person, apparently a Vaishnava of the *Baul* class, engaged in selling tobacco, with long hair and white beard and wearing the *koupin* (loin-cloth). I went and sat by him. I had gone to hear Krishna's name from his lips, but he thought I had gone to buy his tobacco. So we did not come nearer to each other, as he stood on a different ground, far apart. Thus I was foiled everywhere in my quest of the man who cried on Krishna's name. In fact I heard his name nowhere.

during the day, but sometimes even in my dreams. One such picture of my state of mind at the time I have given in prefatory pages of *Sri-Amiya Nimai Charit*

It was the vernal month of May
The *Krishna chura* was abloom,—
A beautiful tree on Churni's bank,
Strolling, I went and sat under it,
Self-absorbed, *Sri Chaitanya Bhagavata* in my hand
From each page, each word in it,
Nectar seemed to drop
A yellow plumed bird from the skies
Descending came and sat on a branch
And started singing *Harinam*
His friends on the tree took the cue
And in a chorus intoned,—'*Hari Hari*',
Like drugged I lay, my heart in a tremor,
I woke up to the warbling above,—
To the feathery ones' '*Hari Hari*',
And naught else entered my ears
All around was one only note,
And its resounding refrain of '*Hari-Hari*'
Up above I cast my eyes,
And on the firmament vast,
In flaming letters of gold—
Clear and bold,—
I read,—'*Hari-Hari*'
My ears heard no other sound,
My eyes caught no other sight,
Save '*Hari Hari*',—'*Hari Hari*'
And I, reproaching myself
'The whole universe is ringing with His name
Thy days alone are spent in pursuits vain'

"Like flying cotton-fleece from the carding machine, my heart was in shreds But no sign or trace of the Vaishnava was in it It was hard for me, English-educated as I was, to conquer the deep-seated notion that religion consisted in praying to God for forgiveness of sins

"One night, as I pondered over these things, I felt that I could never have any peace of mind until I had captured the Real,—got something substantial and convincing to soothe it It was no use living self-deceived

I wondered if there was any hope for the satisfaction of my heart on the path which the great preacher Keshav Chandra Sen had followed during the last twenty five years The next moment some one seemed to whisper ' 'He is, He exists,—there is hope for man, for He is good and He comes when sought from the bottom of one's heart '

"Then the conviction was forced on me that just as I existed, so He too existed and He was very near me He heard all that I said, He was my well-wisher and as one of His creatures I had some claims on Him Why should I not attain to Him then? I shall call unto Him from the bottom of my heart and will seize Him As I argued thus with myself, I felt that it was easy to find Him and I was resolved to FIND

"I was restless all day and night There was but one solace, and it came from perusing the Lord's *leelas* which gave me no end of joy I went through the *Bhagavata*, little by little, so that the book might not be finished much too soon, for I feared there was nothing else to read How could I spend my days when the book was finished?

"I have said before that any business talk was like wormwood to me Even any religious talk other than that on the Lord's *leelas* was distasteful to me I tried to find out people fully conversant with them and met with disappointment, for I found no such person On the other hand, there were some who gave me intense pain by their utter indifference and ignorance If by accident, I came across one who held discourses on Sri Gouranga, with a firm faith in him and his mission, I felt eternally indebted to him What the state of my mind then was is best described in the following two lines of Chandidas

> An indescribable malady, ill can it be described,
> He who speaks of my lover, prone at his feet I lie

"I shall describe my state of mind in those days by narrating a small incident There was a gentleman, Sj Kalidas Nath, who was well versed in *Gour leelas* I felt anxious to hear them from his lips I had by that time returned to Calcutta He was working for his livelihood at a certain place and was not always free His house was very crowded and noisy So, with some difficulty, I got him over to my place and I felt elated Falling at his feet I implored him 'I am dying Try to save me by pouring *Gour leelas* into my ears' He was greatly pained by my humility But the fact is I was not then in a normal state of mind He gave me some relief by his discourses

"It is my belief that a time comes in every man's life, when he gives all his thoughts to God When one is totally obsessed by them and lives practically forgetful of himself and his environments, he is said to be suffering from a malady which is called by the *mahajans* '*purvaraga*' The greater the intensity of this affection, the more fervent becomes his passion for contact with God It is really a disease by itself of which the symptoms are certain changes in the patient both internal and external The *mahajans* have given many descriptions of it When Sri Radha was caught by it, *sakhi* Lalita spoke to Bisakha, Can you divine *sakhi*, what our dear one is suffering from? What is it tormenting her heart? Is she possessed by some spirit of the other world? Without any rhyme or reason, now she weeps and now again she laughs and at times her limbs are seized by a tremor She has no taste for food or sleep nor for her domestic avocations At times her breathing is very hard Was she possessed by some evil spirit when she went down to the Jamuna to fetch water?'

"The intensity of this *purvaraga* which was found in Sri Radha or Sri Gouranga is not to be found in the ordinary man The symptoms in the latter are less pronounced The change which it wrought in me was in this, that I felt a remorse that life so far had been spent in vain I had cast away pearls for shells Life's brief span was nearly over, death might come any day after which I did not know where I would be going And so I should henceforth devote myself wholly and absolutely to worshipping the Lord's lotus feet, renouncing all other pursuits so that I might acquire piety Where was I to go? Who was to give me relief? I knew it was a malady by which I was seized But where was the *Vaid* to give me the right medicine? And this malady grew in intensity, the more I dived into the *leelas* of the Lord In this state of mind I fell at the feet of many persons to give me relief Probing my heart I discovered that the reason why my heart was being torn to pieces was that there was a taint of unbelief or want of complete faith at the back of it But this unbelief was a blessing in disguise The reason why I was feeling the torment of a scorpion bite was that I had not studied Vaishnavism from the beginning to the end in all its aspects, I had not till then come to believe that Sri Gouranga was God incarnate I remember I had once written to my elder brother (Hemanta Kumar) that whatever Sri Gouranga may have said or displayed I could not put my faith in Radha Krishna

"Such was the state of my mind But I had started doing *kirtan* At first it was *Hari kirtan* Sri Gouranga came nowhere in it and of course not Radha Krishna Gradually it came to be more and more revealing, and

taking a *sitar* in my hand, I used to sing such songs relating to the different *leelas* of Gouranga as the *leelas* themselves inspired The *kirtan* gradually came to have more of a life and soul in it and myself and other members of our family who joined in it got deeply absorbed in it At first the *kirtan* was only for an hour in the morning Later, it was sung for three hours every day

"One of those days Moti said to me 'In course of the *kirtan*, I saw a vision At first it was a picture of Radha and Krishna Then the two blended into one and I saw Sri Gouranga' This story of my brother made no difference to me

"Another day, after the *sankirtan* was over and all assembled had left the place, I was taking some rest when certain thoughts came sweeping to my mind I have said before that I did not believe that Sri Gouranga was an *Avatar* But by this time my heart was so softened that I had begun to pray to Him like this 'My Lord, give me a place at Thy lotus feet Give me *prema*, give me *bhakti*, and cleanse me thoroughly' I reasoned to myself that even if Gouranga was not an *Avatar* of God, he was, at any rate, an apostle of His If he reclaimed Jagai and Madhai, he would certainly succeed in reclaiming me Then again I found that if I prayed directly to God He did not bring any comfort to me On the other hand if I prayed to Sri Gouranga, the heart was filled with hope and joy Where God lived I did not know How to pray to Him rightly and effectively, I had no idea So instead of praying to God, I prayed to Sri Gouranga

"As I was thus reasoning to myself sitting pensively after the *sankirtan* some one seemed to breathe into my ears 'What a fool you are! What is your objection to taking Sri Gouranga as an incarnation of God? Perhaps you wonder how the Great God the Supreme Ruler of the Universe could come down to earth in the guise of man Do you not, when praying to God, adorn Him with the attribute, "full of love and compassion'? You of course do, but comes it from your lips or from your heart? Call unto Him once as the kindest God, the loving God, from the very bottom of your heart, and then you will see that there is nothing strange in a loving and kindly God coming down to earth for man's salvation You will then realize that it would indeed be strange if He did not Believe in His love and then you will believe in His coming down as a man Your faith in His love and in His goodness will then grow a thousand times more intense and you yourself will then experience such a sense of joy that it will compel you to go about dancing in ecstasy' These words went deep into my heart, and I felt as if a heavy stone that was pressing on it had been suddenly removed and I breathed

more freely and a light dawned before me Then I thought within myself 'O! then He *did* come? It is true then that the Supremest Lord of the Universe, the Great One Himself to whom all devotees looked forward for His sheltering grace did come down in man's guise and danced and sang amongst us and lastly renouncing his old mother, his young wife and all else in this world had become a *sannyasin* and donning the *koupin* with a beggar's bowl in hand had gone from door to door, begging each man and woman and child to believe that He was their own and that they should learn to love Him as He had loved them

"And I had not learnt to love such a one as He! What a great blunder I had made! He had gone from door to door begging for nothing else but our love and so ungrateful we are that we live forgetful of Him!"

He did not endure this self reproach for long He surrendered himself to Sri Gouranga wholly and after that never did a shadow of doubt that he had found his God in the Nimai of Nadia creep into his mind again The concluding lines of his immitable work, *Kalachand-Gita*, of which a free English rendering is given below, reveal the faith he had attained at the end of his earlier trials

Sachi's darling! What more than this
Can I say to thee
Than that thou hast to me
Given infinite bliss?
I was going about inflated
With the little knowledge I had got,—
Ignorant and vain,—
When thou camest and revealed thyself
Wherefore, thou only knowest,—
And didst soothe a heart, parched and scarred
Ever ailing, my mind fatigued,
Fully I couldn't serve thee
But it grieves me not,
Thou knowest the reasons as thou knowest my heart
In my sorrows, I have wept,—
A common weakness of man
It hurts me to think
What pain it gave to thee

The learned, proud, knowledge possessed,
Came to argue "Thou wert a man,—

Not a god on earth "
But they, alas, knew not my heart,
Nor why I gave it to thee
They knew not what
I had to thee in secret said
'Hear my lord!
Thou hast stolen my mind and my heart,
Indeed my all,—
Leaving nothing mine own to call
Out of thy sheltering home
I could stray no more
Wherever thou beest, I will be,
And if thou, *my prop, dost fall,*
I too shall fall with thee,—
Thy name on my lips,—
In perfect peace"

And he *did* die with that name on his lips in perfect peace

That Shishir Kumar was singularly honest, that he practised what he preached, that his was a loving heart which throbbed as much for others as for his own relations that he was a firm believer in the cult that one who wished to love God should first learn to love and adore his *bhaktas*, is made very clear in the following excerpts from some private letters written by him to a young relation and disciple, at different times The true character of a man in all its aspects is best known not from what he preaches from the platform but from how he thinks feels or acts in his private life

He writes from Deoghar

"I am recovering I go up to the hills and ride a pony I think I shall yet live a few more years I cannot quite describe what I felt on reading your letter I had wished to write, fully opening my heart *to you But as you may not get this letter, I am curbing my wish* Sri Vrindaban has bloomed in your heart, and rather early in life What more can I say?" — (*Translated*)

Writing from Deoghar again

"You are seeing Sri Vrindaban I am sharing your joy from here I am sending your letter to Calcutta for perusal there I tasted honey in every word of it Write to me daily if you can Do not care to judge.

as to what you write, good or bad. Write on whatever you see there and whatever thoughts come to your mind, and I will find sweetness in it Live under the wings of Goswamiji * He is one of our Lord s near ones Visit the places where Lord Gouranga had set his feet, and falling prostrate pay your homage Take the dust of such spots and smear your body with it But first read the description of the Lord's sojourn in Vrindaban as given in *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* I do not know what stuff you are It may be you find revealed to you some of the deepest mysteries of Sri Krishna *leela* I have felt overcome with joy on going through your letter ' — (*Translated*)

In another letter (*English*)

Your lichis are sweet but the letter sweeter When I heard *of your success* † *a shade of sorrow passed over my face, I felt as* if I lost you It is quite true without us you will be alone in the world and you will have to steer your own vessel But yet you have the *Nimai Charit* and *Kalachand Gita* for your companions In them you will find us Besides, my revered *Mejda* once told me a philosophy which I know to be true It is this ' What one has got he will not lose ' You have got the seed and you will never lose it It is bound to germinate, either now or sometime after Your duties will no doubt stand in your way, they are so very corroding and hurtful, but my *ashirbad* is upon you and as a *Gourdas*, my *ashirbad* comes from Him Yet I have hopes He will not keep us long separate and bring you in our midst Excuse me, the subject is tender and it breaks my heart to continue it All right Affly Shishir "

In yet another letter (*English*)

" You must know the universal law of attraction holds good both for the material and spiritual world In the material world this force is called attraction and the centre is the sun In the spiritual world this attraction is called love and the centre is the spiritual sun, that is, God To make the thing short, it is love which is the grand force in the spiritual world To cultivate this feeling is the chief aim of our earthly life Fool is he who has lived only to love self Lucky is he who has lived to love others This is the principle I have been teaching to the world and the members of my family Thank

* Referring to Sj Madhu Sudan Goswami (now deceased) a *sevait* of Sri Radha Ramanji and a descendant of Gopal Bhatta, one of the earliest settlers in Vrindaban

† Refers to a competitive Service examination

God I am surrounded by loving hearts I have a fond hope you are one such There is yet one deep-seated sorrow in my heart And do you know what it is? That sorrow proceeds from the behaviour of . * He is good to me but I wish he were bad to me and good to all others Keep up a correspondence with him and tell him to love not only his relations but all mankind Affly Shishir'

Such were the sentiments and such the teachings of Shishir Kumar

An account of how he was gradually drawn to Sri Gouranga of Nadia and surrendered himself to him has been given above If the reader will go through his *Kalachand-Gita* he will find a picture of this conversion in many of its pages As stated in the Introduction to its English translation *In Quest of Bliss* ' the various phases through which doubting man struggles until faith conquers him and takes him aloft as depicted in this book are but the pictures of the author s own personal experiences in life

* Refers to one of his sons who later in his life made ample amends

CHAPTER VIII

BROADCASTING BHAKTI-SEEDS

WHEN Krishna was sporting with his cowherd companions in the forests of Vrindaban, one of them plucked a wild fruit, and tasting it, held it up to Krishna's mouth and said "How sweet is this wild fruit, Krishna! Give it a bite" And another, who had plucked quite a number and kept them tied at his scarf end smiling said

Very sweet indeed is this fruit, Krishna!
Finding it sweet I ate no more,
But have kept them all for thee
When we have all had a taste of it,
It will make us bound in glee
Let us all dance, let us all dance,
Arm in arm — in a circle dance

A fond mother keeps concealed parts of the sweets given by her mother-in law, to pass them on to her own dear little ones

So it was with Shishir Kumar Having tasted the sweets of the Lord's *leelas*, he became restless to share them with others Four hundred years before, Sri Chaitanya Deva after having stormed his native village of Nadia with his clarion call of love through his *kirtan* parties sent out his followers to all parts of the country to preach his mission, as Buddha had done in his time The seeds of Vaishnavism were sown broadcast all over the land and the thousands who embraced the creed were carried away by its appeal In course of time, however, ignorant people came to miss the true meaning of Sri Gouranga's teachings and to confuse the spiritual love of Radha-Krishna with the carnal lust of man The *gopis'* love for Sri Krishna which Sri Gouranga had demonstrated came to be perversely represented by such people and certain sects sprang up which brought disgrace on themselves and on Vaishnavism

itself by these perversities Gradually, the educated classes came to look down upon the creed Such was the condition of Vaishnavism when Shishir Kumar was drawn to its mysteries

In the earlier stages of his infatuation, he had, at considerable expenses, got many Goswamis and *Babajis* to come to his house from distant places, in order to learn from them all that they could teach, but he found that most of them had totally failed to grasp the spiritual significance of Radha-Krishna s love sports He derived no satisfaction from them Not that there was no true Vaishnava to be found in the country, but the reason why this religion had deteriorated in its character and outlook was, as Shishir Kumar found, that the race of the teachers who went about different parts of the country in the past, disseminating the teachings of Sri Chaitanya, had gradually disappeared and the latter-day *bhaktas* were content with following the precepts of Sri Gouranga for their own spiritual uplift in seclusion Shishir Kumar keenly felt the want of propaganda, and to meet it, he started the *Vishnupriya Patrika*, a monthly, which was converted later to a fortnightly journal, devoted exclusively to discourses on Sri Gouranga's religion of love In the year 1899, with the co-operation of Rai Yatindra Nath Choudhury, zemindar of Taki (24 Pergs), and Vidyabhushan (then Doctor) Rasik Mohan Chakravarty, he established a Society which came to be known as Sri Gouranga Samaj For sometime its activities were confined to the reading of the sacred books, discourses on them, expositions of difficult texts, lectures in the Society's room, and *sankirtan* But Shishir Kumar realized that this would not suffice to secure that wider publicity which was a prerequisite of any campaign of proselytism which might be determined upon In those days, the Christian Mission Societies were busy making conversions Public parks like the College Square, the Beadon Square, the Wellington Square, and the Calcutta Maidan, where citizens used to flock of evenings, had come to be the chosen grounds for Christian catechisms to be rehearsed and Christian doctrines preached by the zealous foreign missionaries themselves or by their paid Indian converts It was an object lesson to Shishir Kumar who selected those very places for *sankirtan* parties and the preachers of his *samaj* People were greatly attracted to them and it was obvious before long that the higher teachings of Vaishnavism made an appeal to their intellect and their heart Gradually, the intellectual classes were disabused of their prejudices and flocked to the banner Propaganda parties were also sent out to other places in Bengal In Calcutta itself, meetings of the Gouranga Samaj were held in the Classic Theatre, in the Oriental Seminary, and in the City College The first of these was presided over by Pundit Gokul Chandra Goswami, the second by Raja Benoy Krishna Dev Bahadur, and the third by Dr Mahendra Lal Sarkar They were all attended by the most distinguished

people of Calcutta Dr Sarkar in course of his presidential speech said "I am nearly 65 years old I have attended many meetings and presided over many others but at no meeting did I derive such pleasure as I have done this day . Truly, for us there is no other path to salvation than the one shown by Sri Gouranga '

One day discoursing on *Gour-leela* with some of his most intimate friends Shishir Kumar said ' It is my earnest desire that the coming birthday anniversary of the Lord be celebrated in Calcutta in a befitting manner But it all depends on His grace Let our Gouranga Samaj take the lead to do something for it Its celebration will show what number of people have surrendered themselves at the lord's feet The proposal met with hearty support from his friends To fix up the details, a meeting was held in the *Vishnupriya Patrika* office and another at the house of Raja Binoy Krishna Dev, at both of which the office-bearers of many of the *Hari Sabhas* of Calcutta were present by invitation They all gave the proposal their blessings Leaflets notifying the coming events were also distributed All *sankirtan* parties in the town were specially invited to join with their *khol, kartals* (cymbals) and other musical instruments The date fixed was the 27th of March 1899, of course a *Falguni-Purnima* day, and the venue the Beadon Square which was in the central part of North Calcutta From about 3 o'clock in the afternoon people began to come from all parts in hundreds By evening, the Square itself and the adjoining thoroughfares covering about half a mile, overflowed with a seething mass of humanity, roughly estimated at nearly a lac in number Two triumphal arches were erected at the two ends of Beadon Street with musical parties atop, discoursing instrumental music appropriate to the occasion The whole of Beadon Street and the Square wore a festive air with flags and festoons and flowers and thousands of coloured lights, giving the place the look of a fairyland From thousands of throats went forth the cry of *Haribol* and about 400 *sankirtan* parties sang and danced in their ecstasy, with drums and cymbals keeping time with the melodies The highest in society jostled in the crowd with the lowest, oblivious of their places Only one spirit pervaded the whole gathering, the spirit of devotion and surrender Strangers embraced each other, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the Brahmin and the Sudra crying *Haribol-Haribol*, in complete abandon There was not the slightest disturbance in all these demonstrations, and a Police Inspector who had been placed on duty with a posse of constables said 'I have had to attend at many gatherings to keep the peace but I had never witnessed before a sight like this Peace reigned here spontaneously and I am going back with solace in my own heart "

The *Basumati*, one of the leading newspapers, observed in its next issue "We witnessed a sight which, though seen through a hundred births and rebirths, will never become stale It seemed as if the same stream of love which had flooded Nadia 400 years ago had reappeared in Calcutta on the last full moon evening carrying away in its headlong tide the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the Brahmin *pundit* and the despised Sudra, all crying *Haribol Haribol*, and prostrating themselves in the dust Words cannot describe that sight It was for the eyes to see and the ears to hear We gazed at the scene with speechless wonder and as we did so, our hearts were purged of all vanity *Harinam* pouring forth from a lac of throats overwhelmed us" The *Somprakash*, another leading newspaper, said "On the last *Dol Purnima* day, a sight was seen in Calcutta which was beyond the imagination of the people . The *sankirtan* organized by the earnest and untiring efforts of Sri Gouranga's devotee, Shishir Kumar Babu of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, in the Beadon Square, was a thing to be seen, to be believed and can hardly be described . Jealousy, envy, calumny, malice, hatred, pride,—all passions seemed to have vanished and peace to have settled on mankind"

As a direct result of these celebrations, branches of the Gouranga Samaj sprang up in many mofussil towns in Bengal

But Shishir Kumar knew all too well that there was no tenacity of purpose amongst his countrymen and no perseverance and that their zeal evaporated very quickly He realized that it was necessary to propagate Sri Gouranga's religion of love through books written in popular language which might find a place in the homes of aspirants and be a source of constant inspiration to them In furtherance of this object, he wrote and published the *Amiya Nimai Charit* in six volumes, in Bengali,—a book of outstanding merit which was chiefly instrumental in reviving Sri Chaitanya's mission in Bengal It was read widely throughout the province, not only by those who were inclined to that faith but also by intellectualists who had so long looked dubiously at it on account of the corruptions which had crept into it by the practices of the *Sahajya* and other so-called 'Vaishnavite' sects The publication of this book was followed by numberless unbelievers being converted to this faith Motilal Ghosh once asked Sir Gurudas Banerji what he thought of having an English translation made of the book Sir Gurudas replied that it would do a lot of good to the world Motilal then told him "You are the fittest person to translate it It is my *Shejdada's* earnest wish that you should take it up" Sir Gurudas replied "I am not endowed with the talent and intellectual capacity essential for this work It needs a Ruskin to accomplish it" The

two brothers were disappointed But Shishir Kumar did not lose heart Instead of a translation of the book, he wrote and published an entirely new one in English, entitled *Lord Gouranga* in two volumes This book was widely read by foreigners in this country and, as the Maharaja of Darbhanga, presiding over the memorial meeting to Shishir Kumar held in the Calcutta Town Hall, said, "was instrumental in popularizing Vaishnavism in America where there are many converts to its faith resulting in the erection of a Vaishnava Temple at Chicago' A further reference to these books will be made at a subsequent place It will be enough to add here for a proper appreciation of the source from which Shishir Kumar drew his inspiration when writing *Amiya Nimai Charit* that whenever in the course of it any doubt or difficulty besieged him, he repaired to the seclusion of his prayer-room and shut himself up there, sometimes for hours, and then came out with tears of joy in his eyes, to resume his writing

"Shishir Babu s *Jatra*", as it came to be popularly known, was another medium through which he sought to diffuse the *rasas* of Krishna *leela* to the people of Bengal It was an opera company organized by him in the nineties of the last century He conceived the idea of a play in three Acts,— *Abhisara* of Sri Radha or her quest for Sri Krishna, *Mana* or pique at the delay in the Lord s appearance, and lastly, *Mathur*, depicting Sri Krishna s installation in the kingdom of Mathura, and the pangs of separation from which Radha nearly died, ending with the Lord's reappearance in Vrindaban and his union with her Where were the players of this *Vraja-leela* to be found — the cowherd boy of the forest land, the princely daughter of Brikabhanu's king, and the herdmaids of that pastoral country,— and the immortal *sakhis*, Lalita and Bisakha, the amorous Chandravali and the unbeatable ambassadress Srimati Vrinda, except in a dreamland of the past? Yet they had to be brought forth to play their parts once more albeit in mimicry Playwright Shishir Kumar had about twenty-five rustics brought from his village, mostly boys in their teens and a few grown ups, the only criterion of their selection being musical talent in one form or another They were maintained in Shishir Kumar s Calcutta house (No 2 Ananda Chatterji's Lane) and every morning they were called up in the big hall on the first floor and made to go through their lessons Shishir Kumar or Motilal would sit with them and coach them in acting and teach them to sing the songs which constituted the play The little urchins were dressed as *sakhis* and one of them who was found able to simulate Radha's passion for Krishna was picked out for the former s part The ladies of the house dressed them as *gopis*, with a liberal contribution of colourful clothes and trinkets of sorts To teach these callow youngsters to play their parts with dramatic effect, to make them sing the solos or keep pace with the duets or quartets mostly compositions of the saintly poets Vidyapati, Chandidas Govindadas or

Jnanadas to the violin and other instruments was a task for Job and not unoften did the violin bow leave the board and find a sharp lodgement on the back of a particularly stupid learner After about two months training the troupe was considered ready for a performance It was staged in one of the principal Calcutta theatres for a time and played in the premises of *bhaktas* like Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore Raja Benoy Krishna Dev and others

This little drama which was compiled by Shishir Kumar was never published but a number of copies were printed for private circulation An English rendering of it together with most of the songs (in Bengali) which formed its life and soul is found in a booklet entitled *The Quest and the Find* by an author with the pen name of Wanderer who had somehow come into possession of one of those copies In his introduction to it Wanderer gives an insight into this play

> This booklet is based on a number of Bengali songs which constituted an opera staged in Calcutta in the nineties of the last century It drew large crowds of *bhaktas* who went back home with eyes wet The songs were those of saintly poets of old such as Chandidas Jnanadas and other with slight modifications here and there An erudite *bhakta* strung them together and wove them into three Acts of the Divine Play of Sri Radha Krishna The pictures wrought on the minds of those who were privileged to assist at the play will still be recalled by many The *rasa* which flowed forth cleansed the heart which for a time at least travelled into Vrindaban Ardently wishing that the same *rasa* may be tasted by non Bengali readers even though the world has since very much advanced and modernized I have ventured on an English rendering of it

We may quote here a few passages out of the book itself to give the reader a further insight into the theme

When Radha sensing Krishna's near presence seeks to rush out on her mad quest heedless of habilment unrigged and unequipped her *sakhis* protest

> Wait our queen we shall adorn thee
> Come let us dress thy hair
> And tie a lovely knot

The *sakhis* proceed with the toilet while Radha dissents

> A philosopher's stone is my lord
> Touched by him I am now gold
> What need of ornaments for me?
> My hands are ornate
> In the worship of his feet,

My ears, in the music of his name,
My eyes, in feasting on his face,
And my lips, in singing his praise
She who hath these,— and more,—
Her lord himself,—
What can ye give her else?
Even on my neck
A 'blue gem' wreath I wear,
Ever pendent on my breast
If ye are yet on toilet bent,
Give me no hackney'd trinket,
But write instead,
Over my person,—
'Krishna', 'Krishna', 'Krishna',
My supremest adornment

But the *sakhis* triumph They hold her fast and busy themselves, advising her not to hamper and delay

Quick, quick, our sporting queen,
Don thy gayest dancing skirt
The hour comes for the signal flute,
To blow, and make thy patience fly
Thou shalt then run,
Fast and faster,
Losing thy breath
And lest in running, thy hair uncoil
Let us tie it hard

The toilet completed, Brikabhanu's princess daughter goes forth towards yonder bower, gaily decked, with all the *gopis* in her train to meet her Lord and Lover But the ever-elusive He, ever slipping away from grasp, was not to be found therein She tramped on,— a long way,— through the woods, bleeding from thorns and brambles, but nowhere was He to be *found* In her grief and despair, she then laments

In the precincts of my bower,
Why did I make a bed of flowers?
For what good, for what bliss?
The bees run mad with the honey sucked,
But what of me?
I only die of an anguished heart
I've sown the *Jati*,

I've grown the *Yuthi*,
I've grown the *Malati* sweet,
But with their fragrance
I've lost my sleep,
Hard is man and the male species
I culled the flowers
And cut their stems
To make the softest bed,
If thereon I went to sleep
It pricked — as a hundred thorns
Why did I in secret
Give my heart to him?
Now indeed I know,—
His love is too precious to own,
As for a beggar the gold

The *sakhis* try to bring hope and solace But Radha feels that her life's brief span is spent and she bursts forth

Will the lord of my life
Come to rule when life itself is gone?
Life doth no waiting brook
What help is there for me?
A hardened hypocrite is he,
Yet in ceaseless quest of him
My eyes are drowned in tears

When the Lord appeared at last, after a long spell of waiting, drowned in tears, Radha opens her heart unto Him

After ages long
Thou art returned
To our bower and home!
If life was gone,
Thou and I had met no more

And the *sakhis* taunt Him

Mathura's king and Kubja s friend!
Has the face of our queen
After years of forgetting
On your memory dawned?

They tell Him

Withered she lay, our lotus queen,
Her sap of life dried up,

Not for her so frail and fair
Such piercing shafts to bear

Radha's selfless love rises in protest

My woes I count not no sufferings mine,
My bliss I count in seeking thine

The *sakhis* bear witness to it

Oblivious ever of her own,
She counts her blisses and her woes
In terms of those your own

The Lord bore all the taunt and insult which the *sakhis* were privileged to shower on Him At last He opened His lips and addressing Radha, declared

Thou art the golden lotus darling
Full blown on a lake filled to the brim with love
Let me gaze on thee and fill my eyes with thy beauty
The lake is full of ripples,
And lo! there are now waves —
The ripples and waves which thy love hath raised,
And now in this storm I feel like lost,
For on its waters I've ne'er swam,
And untaught to swim, herein I drown
But ere I go know that I AM THINE,
And nowise less than THOU ART MINE

We, small beings, might try to find the highest philosophy in the simple words ' I AM THINE " and " THOU ART MINE "

CHAPTER IX

A VOTIVE OFFERING

AMIYA NIMAI CHARIT

BEFORE we enter into the sublime region of *Gouranga-leela* as recounted in *Amiya Nimai Charit*, a brief rèsume of the intensely busy life of its author, extending over a period of fifty years, will be useful in estimating his contributions to the nation and to his fellow beings Unquestionably he will be remembered long as one of the veteran journalists of India whose burning patriotism made him fight fearlessly against the despotism of a bureaucratic Government through the medium of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, making it the most hated in officialdom amongst all newspapers in India He will also be acknowledged as one of the first band of patriots who roused in the people a consciousness of their rights and privileges which gave birth to the spirit of Indian nationalism But the most precious legacy he left was not political but spiritual Born a God seeker, he clung passionately to his faith in God's love for His creatures and relied upon it to bring relief to the distressed It was this faith in God and in His love which was his strongest bulwark in the battles he fought in his life He explored different avenues to reach His presence and to make his fellow beings realize His nearness He found that the path led him through the gateway of Vaishnavism — the beautiful road laid out by Sri Chaitanya Deva which had since been overrun by weeds and brambles Wayfarers were confused and lost in the narrow by ways they sought to discover for themselves His contribution to the revival of Vaishnavism in Bengal was the greatest gift to his countrymen,— the most valued bequest In the mass consciousness roused by the present-day political leaders, Shishir Kumar's Jhikargacha meeting of the seventies may be forgotten, in the organized national movement for independence and sacrifices made for it, Shishir Kumar's labours in securing local self government may be lost sight of, but his ardent endeavours to awaken God-consciousness through the cult of

Vaishnavism and purification of the soul are sure to bear fruit in the fulness of time Shishir Kumar himself may be forgotten in spite of a statue here or a biography there, but the prints on human minds left by his immortal works *Amiya Nimai Charit* and *Kalachand Gita* will remain indelible for all time to come

Sri Amiya Nimai Charit consists of six volumes with an aggregate of over two thousand pages The author started on this work about the year 1894 and finished it on the 10th December, 1910, a few hours before he left this world It is said that a man is best judged by his works It is not the purpose of this biographical sketch to describe at any length the life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya Deva which are to be found in numberless books on the subject and in *Amiya Nimai Charit* itself We shall however, have to refer to some salient portions of it, as reading them, we may read the heart of the author, and as they help to give a true picture of Shishir Kumar, the *bhakta*, in tears, swimming in a stream of bliss or drowning in a sea of love, as distinguished from the fiery patriot and the biting journalist After his death, some of his friends and admirers prefixed the title 'Mahatma' to his name in true appraisal of his greatness It is certain that in his lifetime he would have refused to be adorned by it, having attained detachment from all earthly possessions and been at no time blinded by their glamour

He took up the task of writing *Amiya Nimai Charit* with all the humility of a true Vaishnava and confidence in the grace of God. He introduces the book with a Prologue of which the following is a free English rendering

Like a flash He came,
Pitying looked at me,
And in His arms upraised,
As on the burning sand I lay,
Turning on my sides in great unrest
He led me into a bower
Laden with flowers
So soft and cool
Lonesome and silent,
Save for the bees that hummed
Meritless as I was,
Ill could I guess
Why His heart was moved for me
All was there so strange to me,
In sweet bewilderment I gazed

My frame was soothed,
My life returned,
Soon as the balmy air I breathed
With a magic and a dream
The bower was wove
Drifting on an endless sea
Current-carried or in a pool,
Now sinking, now with a mouthful
Of briny water, gasping for life,—
I felt I had found the place at last
Where, conflicts set at rest,
There was comfort for the soul
At last I saw the Hand,— so large —
That had brought me there,
And given His soothing touch
Then before His lotus feet,
With bended knees and forehead on the earth,
I took the vow His love to proclaim
From door to door,
Surrendering to Him my life and soul,
And pay in part the debt I owed

Then he proceeds ' It will serve no useful purpose to enter into a discussion as to whether Sri Gouranga was God incarnate or only a *bhakta* Those who believe sincerely that God is kinder than the kindest of His created beings cannot reasonably contend that it is inconceivable for Him to come down to earth in human form It is only those who endow Him with that quality half heartedly may wonder why at all He should descend amongst us The former class of men with their sincere faith in God s kindness will not find it difficult to believe that He *can* come amongst us and therefore, they will find no reason to hold that the stories of His having come down in the past, in one form or another, in this and other countries are merely mythical As to *why* He should choose to come, the answer is found in the *Bhagavata-Gita* in His own words

> ' For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age ' "

The author ends this discussion with this simple logic " If it be to our interest and also our fervent wish to find Him, then, as we cannot rise to His height and to His greatness to be able to go up to Him, He, in His infinite kindness,

has to assume our small proportions so as to find accommodation in a small world of puny men The author evidently meant to say that if He came down as He was the earth would be too small to hold even a millionth fraction of Him and man would not have that whole and complete picture of Him which alone could satisfy his longings When Arjun was given a glimpse of God in His fulness he cried out in utter bewilderment

> With mouths eyes arms breasts multitudinous
> I see Thee everywhere — unbounded Form
> Beginning middle end nor source of Thee
> Infinite Lord infinite Form I find
>
> (*Bhagavata Gita* xi 16)

Again

> The triple worlds sink down O mighty One
> Before Thine awful manifested Form
>
> (*Ibid* xi 20)

And again

> My inmost soul is quaking having seen
> My strength is withered Vishnu and my peace
>
> (*Ibid* xi 24)

Then Vasudeva said consoling

> Be not bewildered be thou not afraid
> Because thou hast beheld this awful Form
> Cast fear away and let thy heart rejoice
> Behold again mine own familiar shape
>
> (*Ibid* xi 49)

Having thus tried to establish that God does come down amongst us in human form the author expresses the hope that those who are unable to reconcile themselves to the belief that Sri Gouranga was God incarnate would probably come to be convinced after going through his *leelas* of at least three things namely that God exists that His qualities are countless and that He can be found He emphasizes that the man who firmly believes in these three propositions is freed of all sorrows

The author concludes this preliminary discourse with the observation that the life and teachings of Gouranga are drawn from reliable records left by his own contemporaries who had witnessed his *leelas* from day to day including such as could not be said to have been carried away by mere frenzy of faith but were renowned intellectualists and savants of his time Such was the documentary ground he points out on which he based all that is contained in *Amiya Nimai Charit*

The first volume of the book opens with a preamble giving a description of Bengal and more especially of Navadweep as they were at the time, 400 years before, when Sri Gouranga was born at that place Bengal was then under Mohammedan Governors About this time, one Hussain Shah was the Governor of Bengal, then known as 'Gaud He had under him a number of *foujdars* and *kazis* who had the actual work of administration done by Hindu rajas under them and themselves functioned merely as collectors of revenue from the latter, part of which they kept for themselves remitting the balance to the Governor of the Province The *foujdars* and *kazis*, with their respective criminal and civil jurisdictions lived like princes with a large number of troops at their command ostensibly to maintain law and order, but used principally in terrorizing the Hindu rajas and to add to their own power and prestige

Navadweep also called Nadia, was one of the principal cities of Bengal It was situated on the east bank of the Bhagirathi and the present town known as Navadweep on the opposite bank of the river was then known as Kulia

Navadweep was then a most populous city of all castes the Brahmin teachers in the *tols* (Sanskrit schools) predominating as the leaders in society, specially those who were learned in *Nyaya* philosophy The great seat of learning of this philosophy was, however, Mithila, where students flocked from all parts of the country, including Navadweep The teachers in Mithila did not wish this philosophy to be taught outside their own territory, because they feared that their glory as the supreme teachers of this school would thereby be impaired They therefore guarded it jealously and did not allow their students to smuggle any written text on the subject over their borders This embargo was specially imposed on the students from Gaud whose intellectual faculties had struck them at once as outstanding and the pundits feared that Gaud might come to be a rival school Their fears proved well founded For, Basudeva (afterwards Sarbabhouma), finding that his teachers were greatly handicapped in their discourses by the want of authoritative written texts of the Mithila pundits which made it difficult for them to interpret knotty points, resolved to bring the texts from Mithila anyhow He went there as a student and on completing his course returned to Navadweep with the entire doctrine of the philosophy committed to his memory He established a *tol* in Navadweep which drew such renowned students as Raghunatha Raghunandana Bhavananda and Krishnananda each of whom came to be known afterwards as an authority in his own line of philosophy with a countrywide reputation From that time onwards Navadweep grew in importance as a great seat of learning with a *tol* almost in every lane and hundreds of students in each

The whole of Navadweep was a university town, teeming with professors and students, and the primary object of life of the entire community was, to all intents and purposes, pursuit of knowledge It was not the capital of Bengal, nor was it of any commercial importance If there was any trade, it was as between the learned teachers and their pupils, the merchandise being learning There was hardly any member of the higher middle class who was not occupied in intellectual pursuits, the perpetual topic of conversation being the *Shastras* and their teachings Navadweep developed into a unique place with conditions not met with elsewhere Shishir Kumar proceeds to say that preparations for a war convulsed cities from time to time, the discovery of some new process for making money drove people to madness in other places, new religious faiths or radical reforms in the social or political structure of a community or a country caused excitement at still other places, but the only agitation which Navadweep knew was that in the pursuit of knowledge The highest object in life was to be learned An erudite pundit was a blessed creature of God In the eyes of society, that one quality made him handsome, high-born and happy, and such a man was coveted for a son in law even if he was too old for one's daughter The richer class spent liberally to support the learned poor Pedestrians cleared the road and stood aside at the approach of a savant Ladies at the bathing *ghats* discussed *Shastras* while taking their dips, young men in groups were to be seen at different spots engaged in academic disputes,—the legion of students was like an 'army of occupation' in a conquered city They promenaded in hundreds at the *ghats* and along the river-bank, vigorously discoursing on rhetoric, grammar or philosophy Thousands of students entered the city every morning from adjacent places, carrying their *puthis* (texts in manuscript) in their hand No student would go out without his *puthi* Like the Brahmin by his sacred thread or the Oxford graduate by his cap and gown, a Navadweep student was known as such by the *puthi* in his hand It was at once his hall mark, his passport and his adornment

It was in this setting that the lord, Sri Gouranga, after thirteen months of durance in his mother's womb,—

> . was in Sachi's courtyard born,—
> An aureole round his head,—
> On a *Falgun's* full moon eve,
> Eclipsing the radiant queen,
> And a thousand conch-shells blowing

The author goes on to tell us how Nimai (as he was affectionately known in his earlier years) grew up, a playful child, given to extraordinary pranks, almost beyond control, which reminds one of the sportive freaks of the little

boy that was "in dungeon born, on a weird night 'midst rain and storm",— whose flute-call is heard even now by those who can hear The volume ends with the reclamation of Jagai and Madhai (contractions of Jagarnatha and Madhava), two Brahmin brothers who had made themselves dreaded in all parts of Navadweep by their acts of high handedness perpetrated with the connivance of the local *kazi* who was bribed Always in a drunken state, there was no form of violence,— man slaughter, loot, arson, or criminal assaults on women,— in which they did not indulge They were two living demons in Navadweep, monsters in human guise They moved from place to place leaving no part of the town unmolested *Harinam* was anathema to them and the *sankirtan* parties of Gouranga and his *bhaktas* infuriated them And yet, according to authenticated records these fiends were converted into saints, at the instance of Sri Gouranga's supremest devotee, Sri Nityananda In the words of Shishir Kumar, this is how the miracle happened

One day Nityananda told Haridas "Let us go and convey our lord s message to these brothers If they obey, well and good If not, we should not be sorry For we shall have carried out our lord s orders' So these two *bhaktas* went to the place where Jagai and Madhai were seated as lords intoxicated by drink Nityananda or Nitai as he was lovingly called, gave them the challenge "Worship Krishna, take His name that is all we beg of you"

"How dare you?" the brothers shouted "This to us? Have you no fear of your lives?" And then calling out "Let us catch hold of these two hypocrites", they started on a chase but being drunk, they could not proceed far and Nitai and Haridas fled to Gouranga and told him the story of their adventure Nityananda petulantly accused the lord "We shall not go any more on such missions of yours To give *Harinam* to *sadhus* is easy enough for any one We shall know how powerful you are if you can make Jagai and Madhai take to *Harinam* Reclaim these two sinners and let the world know and acknowledge your kindness of heart Wherever I go, I am only abused, people saying 'Get away' That is my reward, and you sit here comfortably in your room with closed doors in the company of your *bhaktas*, doling out your love to them What is it to the world outside? This does not help us to demonstrate your love for them and your endeavours to promote their interest Naturally I become a target for their banter and I have to return hanging my head in shame"

Gouranga "Pious one! Since it is your wish to save them, they shall be saved" The *bhaktas* were elated and shouted *Haribol*

One evening, there was *kirtan* going on in Srivas's courtyard The two brothers were camping in that locality They came to Srivas's house attracted by the noise of the music and *Haribol* The outer doors being closed, they could not find an entry into the yard The cadence of the dance and music just beyond the wall in the open air affected them in their drunkenness, and they began to dance And having once begun the fever would not leave them and they danced throughout the night When the *bhaktas* at the end of the *sankirtan* opened the outer doors at daybreak to go to the Ganges for their ablutions, the brothers accosted Sri Nimai ' Hullo, Nimai Pundit! What is this music society of yours? Are these *Mangal Chandi's* songs? We are much pleased with them You must come to our place one day and give us a show' Sri Nimai gave no reply and walked away with his *bhaktas*

It is said by his followers that Sri Nimai went to the doors of any one who sought him He took the brothers at their words and prepared himself to go to the house of Jagai and Madhai with his *sankirtan* party He asked Nitai and Haridas to assemble all his *bhaktas* " We shall go singing *kirtan* and give them *Harinam* and show its magic potency to the world " said he The same afternoon the *bhaktas* were all gathered in the courtyard of Sri Nimai with their drums, cymbals, conches and trumpets and every one put anklets on his feet Thus they came out of the courtyard with their battle-cry of *Haribol, Haribol* and marched, dancing and singing, towards the house of the two great sinners animated by the foretaste of the adventure Amongst others in the company were Sri Adwaita Acharya, Srivas, Gadadhar, Haridas, Mukunda Narahari and Murari Gupta, the last named being the inspirer of Sri Lochan Das's *Chaitanya Mangal* through his *Karacha* (written record of Sri Gouranga's *leelas*) The description of this adventure taken from a contemporaneous source should be considered authentic

Sri Nitai led the van He had seen with his own eyes the degraded and pitiable condition of Jagai and Madhai and his heart was full of pity for them And why was it he that was most stricken with grief? Lochan Das gives the answer in these pithy lines

> Made of kindness was *Thakur* Nitai!
> Ever alive to others' sorrows,
> His heart broke at the sight of the fallen

He was jubilant that he had succeeded in inducing Sri Nimai to save the two wretches So, feeling triumphant, he led the procession And this was the first *sankirtan* procession through the city Before this, it was always in enclosed courtyards, not open to the ' outer circle '

When the procession reached the house of Jagai and Madhai in the evening, they were still sleeping, having caroused through the whole of the previous night Their sleep was disturbed by the noise of *sankirtan* They sent their servants to stop the noise The servants returned and said that it was a *sankirtan* party of Nimai Pundit and others and they did not care to stop or go away The brothers sprang up from their beds in a fury and came out as they were, in a state of wild dishabille

> Eyes bloody from ire and wine
> Crying, "We'll kill all Vaishnava kind"
>
> (LOCHANDAS)

They approached the *sankirtan* party The *bhaktas*, unperturbed, sang *Harinam* with redoubled energy which infuriated the brothers all the more Even an ordinary man would not take it kindly if his house is assailed suddenly by a 'salvation army' intent on reclaiming him And Jagai and Madhai had a special aversion to *Harinam* How could they stand this calculated insult? Nitai, who was foremost burst into tears as they came for him,— tears at the sight of their degradation

> But the weeping eyes softened not the sinners,
> Right in front of him their stand they took,
> Wild with rage in murderous mood

Nitai was unmoved Addressing Jagai whom he knew to be a shade less depraved than Madhai, he said "Say *Harinam*, Jagai, and you will buy me off" Jagai was somewhat moved and stood brooding But Madhai was of much harder stuff than Jagai and the tears and supplications of Nityananda produced no other effect on him except an unrestrained impulse to hurl an attack on the latter at once Finding no weapon ready at hand he picked up from the road the neck piece of a broken earthen pitcher and flung it straight at Nitai, hitting him on the forehead which began to bleed profusely Nitai danced in joy, crying *Gour, Gour* What was the cause of this joy? It was this that he knew at once that these two sinners were now going to be saved But this exhibition of joy was like fuel to Madhai's fire He took another bit of the earthen pitcher and as he raised his arm to hurl it, Jagai caught hold of it, saying "What are you doing? What valour lies in assaulting a wandering *sannyasin*? And what good will it do to you?" Nitai, bleeding still more from his forehead because of the excitement and the dance, then accosts the brothers

> This bleeding I can bear,
> From the fragment of the pitcher,
> But ill can I bear your piteous plight,

My bleeding matters not to me,
Nor the hand that caused it bleed,
If only you will utter *Haribol*
Strike me again if you so please,
But shout for once *Haribol*

Sri Nimai had witnessed the tragic spectacle but was seemingly indifferent to it and went on singing and dancing It was his object to demonstrate the kindness and piety of Nityananda to the world and to make him the instrument for reclaiming fallen souls But when some *bhaktas* went and spoke to him of Nityananda's condition, he went up and holding him in his arms bandaged the wound with his own cloth And turning to Madhai, he asked: "Why have you hurt my beloved Nitai,—my brother, my very life and soul?" And then he assumed an angry air and said "Vilest sinners! Was not your thirst for crimes satiated by the countless sinful acts you have already committed? Was not your cup of sins too full to hold more? Why did you not strike me instead of my brother Nitai? Your cup is now overflowing, threatening to pollute the earth Take your punishment now" The gangster kings stood before this pundit of Nadia, their heads hung in shame, like prisoners convicted of murder and awaiting capital punishment!

All of a sudden the call went forth from Nimai,—"the *Chakra*, the *Chakra*!" This call for the *Chakra* or *Sudarshan Chakra*, the God Vishnu's great weapon of destruction, alarmed all who were present Murari who often used to be possessed by the spirit of Hanuman came running to Nimai with all the strength of the great warrior *bhakta* of Sri Rama Chandra and besought "Why summonest *Sudarshan*, my lord? I am here Order me and I shall despatch these two scoundrels to the other world" Nitai came to Murari, imploring "My brother, forgive them" And as he had finished saying this, he was dazzled by a flood of light and looking back saw the huge flaming wheel hurtling through the air at Jagai and Madhai, bent upon their annihilation Nitai approached the wheel with joined palms and entreated "Forbear, *Sudarshan*, from destroying these two brothers I am going to beg for their lives at the feet of our lord' The order was obeyed, the *Chakra* retreated And then falling at the feet of Sri Nimai, Nityananda appealed "My lord, what are you about? Have you forgotten everything? It is not your mission this time to inflict punishments Did you not say that in this incarnation of yours you will not hold the club and the discus and that you would save the sinners by dipping them in the spirit of *bhakti* and in the softer appeals of love and pity and kindness? If you destroy the wicked, you would be left with none to save" And then pointing to the two trembling brothers "Pray make a gift of the lives of these two to me as a boon With their help I shall

prove to the world why you are called *Dinabandhu* (a friend of the lowly) and *Patitapavana* (Saviour of the fallen)"

But the lord did not show any sign of being moved Nitai again appealed to him "I was not much hurt It was not their intention to hurt me They only wished to frighten The missile Madhai threw just grazed my forehead by accident and I have not felt any injury at all Delude not the world with your *maya* Your object in assuming sternness is only to raise me in the estimation of it But cry truce to this game and let these two fallen men have a place at your feet"

A large crowd of men, women and children had by this time collected at the place where this drama was being enacted They stood spell bound Nityananda's supplications, his earnest tearful entreaties, his resolve to save the lives of Jagai and Madhai his appeal to *Sudarshan*, had rooted them to the spot in bewilderment and awe The hardest soul in that crowd was softened by pity But there were three who remained unmoved,— the lord himself and the two brothers The latter stood paralysed, with their eyes fixed on lord Gouranga's face

Nityananda spoke again "Besides my lord, you cannot punish both One of them Jagai, has saved my life" "Saved your life?" asked the lord Nityananda told him how Jagai had caught hold of Madhai s arm when the latter was going to strike him for the second time and prevented it, and this had an immediate effect on the lord "Is that so?" he exclaimed "Come, Jagai, you have saved my brother's life I am yours from now Come to me and have my grace" With these words he gave Jagai a loving embrace,— the Jagai who had murdered men and women and was guilty of many other heinous crimes Released from the lord's arms, Jagai fell senseless at his feet

Madhai had stood motionless a silent witness to the lord's anger and his grace He saw that his brother Jagai, a partner in all his crimes, was weeping at the feet of the lord What was all this? He had a sudden awakening He too fell at the lord's feet and cried aloud for forgiveness

The lord receded two steps and spoke "Are you not the king of Nadia? Are you not ashamed to prostrate yourself on the earth, in the midst of this vast concourse of citizens, forgetful of your place and your dignity? No, your salvation does not lie with me It is not for me to save you"

Then Madhai "You are the father of all If you desert me, where am I to go for succour? Both of us had sinned You saved one How could you justify your not saving the other?"

The lord "Jagai had sinned against me I could forgive one who had offended me But I cannot help those who offend my *bhaktas* If I did so, I would be indirectly supporting their enemies"

But Madhai now truly penitent, had not lost all hope He had come to realize the lord s sense of pity and forgiveness and pleaded again "My lord I cannot persuade myself that you will cast me aside Be pleased to say what I should do to merit your forgiveness and I shall act accordingly"

Compassion was visible now on the lord's face, even though he sought to disguise it And he said "Madhai, you hurt Nityananda and made him bleed Go to him Fall at his feet and ask for his grace He may be pleased to save you"

Madhai let go his hold on Sri Gouranga's feet and caught hold of Nitya nanda's, crying "My lord, if only you forgive me, God may yet be pleased to give me sanctuary at His feet"

And the lord himself now pleaded for Madhai "Sripad, everybody has seen that in your charity you were prepared to give pardon to Madhai even before he had sought it But it would not be right It would only mean a premium to vice So I am seeking forgiveness for him and entreating you for it which will show the depth of his sinfulness The *sâdhus* never deny it to the truly repentant prostrating at their feet"

Nityananda, his voice chocked with emotion replied "My lord, I knew you were resolved to rescue these two sinners but were only making me the instrument of your act It is your wish to show your love to your *bhaktas* and to raise them in the eyes of the world, so that they may be enabled to help you in your mission, and carry your banner high Be it so then Come, Madhai, let me embrace you" With these words Nityananda clasped him to his breast Madhai fell senseless on the ground alongside his brother Jagai The *bhaktas* in chorus cried *Haribol, Haribol,* and leaving Jagai and Madhai where they were, formed a procession with Sri Gouranga and Sri Nitai at its head and wended their way back to the lord s place When they were resting in the courtyard moved by the happenings of the evening, there was a knock at the door, a voice crying, ' *Thakur, Thakur*" On enquiry it was found that

Jagai and Madhai were waiting at the door outside The lord asked Murari to bring them in Murari, still in the possession of Sri Hanuman, went out, took up the two brothers in his two arms and dumped them on the courtyard, thus crushing the vanity of the two brothers for their great physical strength And again they fell down senseless at the sight of the lord Sri Gouranga then asked Nitai to take them to the Ganges and pour *Harinam* into their ears The *bhaktas* carried them on their shoulders like two corpses and placed them on the river bank Nadia was now in a tumult The news had spread all over the town that Jagai and Madhai had been captured and the citizens flocked in thousands to the river side, to see the fallen giants

Then the lord, in the hearing of the thousands of men and women who had assembled, loudly proclaimed "Nityananda, I make a gift of these two creatures to you Sanctify them by a bath in the Ganges and make them the precious present of *Harinam*" Still unconscious, they were carried by the *bhaktas* into the water at the touch of which they regained their sense Then the lord and Nitai and the *bhaktas* and the two reclaimed brothers all took their dips In the glorious moonlight which made things visible as in the day, the assembled thousands on the bank saw Jagai and Madhai and Sri Gouranga waist deep in the sacred water, surrounded by the *bhaktas* A piece of copper and some *tulasi* leaves were then placed in the hands of each brother and the lord once more in a loud voice accosted them thus "Madhava (Madhai) and Jagarnatha (Jagai), whatever the sins ye two committed in your lifetime, transfer them all unto me ratifying it with the copper and the *tulasi* as witnesses and be ye cleansed and purified" And the lord extended his open palms to receive

But Jagai and Madhai,—now made Jagarnatha and Madhava,—refused pointblank to obey this behest of the Lord, protesting thus "Lord, forgive us our impertinence and spare us from this supremest of iniquities As long as the sun and moon will exist, men will say that Jagai and Madhai, unable to bear the burden of their sins, passed them on to the lord to escape their punishment"

Nityananda once more came to their rescue He told them they were foolish "Do you not know that one of the sweetest names of *Sri Bhagavan* was *Patitapavana* (Saviour of the fallen)? You two shall bear testimony to its appropriateness What, if you are defamed by this act in the eyes of the world? It will only redound to the glory of the lord Man should sacrifice himself to demonstrate that He is not, as some men think, a friend only of the saintly but also a greater friend of the blind and beguiled, the utterly depraved

and fallen So, carry out the lord's wishes" The two brothers lowered their heads Forthwith the priest,—Nityananda,—uttered the *mantram* of transfer and made them repeat the same, the lord proclaiming to the world "I accept this transfer of all your sins"

All Nadia assembled on the bank heard it The world hears it till this day Those in the 'inner circle' noticed that for a moment the lord's complexion of molten gold had turned into black, going to prove that Jagai and Madhai had been purged of all impurities

Such was the rescue of Jagai-Madhai as chronicled by eye-witnesses with teachings as lofty and comprehensive as are to be found in all the scriptures put together Which is more difficult,—withal glorious and sublime,—the subjugation of a million living creatures of God through the infernal weapon of an atom bomb or the peaceful victory over a satanic soul resolutely bent on the destruction of God s Kingdom,—and through the hidden potency of love alone? Such a potency was in the *Avatar* of Nadia, such love in Nityananda

The second volume opens with a letter of dedication to his eldest brother Basanta Kumar from which we learn that even when he was no older than thirteen and his brother eighteen, the latter initiated him into the mysteries of incarnation The brother told him one day "It is only through good luck one comes to have a faith in God's incarnation If I ever have it, I shall pin it on Sri Gouranga of Nadia" And boy Shishir Kumar asked who he was Basanta Kumar told him that as Jesus of Nazareth was to the Christians, so was Sri Gouranga to us and that both were alike in many respects This was his first introduction to the lord to whom he passionately clung till the last day of his life and whose debts he tried to pay by writing his *leelas*

In this volume, after concluding his discourse on *Bhakti Rasa*, the author takes his rise to *Prema Rasa*, describing how Sri Gouranga had plunged into it, drowning the country in its flood That the author had himself tasted of it and was intoxicated, would appear from the following lines in the introduction

"In *Madhura rati* there are three stages. *Purvaraga* or the first flame of love, leading to the quest for the Beloved, *Milana* or the union with Him, and *Viraha* or estrangement, giving rise to the feeling caused by separation The last of these three, *Viraha*, is the highest and the most elevating, for therein are to be found also the blisses of both, namely, the Quest and the Find Sri Nimai demonstrated in his own self how to have a taste of these three *rasas* and thereby taught man how to taste of them I have tried my own best to

describe them but I have not been fully satisfied with it Perhaps it is beyond the power of language to give them the fullest expression or it may be, it was beyond my own limited capacity to do it Whatever the reason, I shall ever carry this sorrow that I could impart to my readers only a very small fraction of the sweetness which my own heart had tasted" Further, he makes one fervent appeal to all aspirants which is fully worth their attention and may be reproduced· "No one has learnt the alphabet of a language without application It is not in the nature of these *rasas* to be properly appreciated without *sadhana* and meditation, merely through dry reading of books Meditate on Him, be closetted with Him try to see Him and hear Him, and very soon the scale that blinds the eye will be cast off"

It is in this volume that the author gives a graphic account of that momentous event in Sri Gouranga's life, his great Renunciation, his renouncing of the world overnight and taking to the *sannyasin's* life, of which a parallel is not found after Buddha There is, however, the one difference between the two, in that while Prince Siddhartha renounced the world struck by the infirmities to which the flesh was subject to, disease and sorrows, decay and death,—feeling sick of the world himself and intent on attaining his salvation in *Nirvana*, Sri Gouranga became a *sannyasin* not in discontentment or dejection but with a full sense of appreciation of the bliss to be relished in our everyday life, never mistaking the afflictions of the world as evils by themselves, as causes of our sorrows, nor with a view to attain his own salvation For, even if he be not regarded as an incarnation but only as a saint whose soul had reached the Oversoul, there could be, for one such, no quest after salvation He abjured *samsara* because he found that man had forgotten his Maker and, oblivious of Him, was drowned in iniquities, and because he knew that

Harinama, Harinama, Harinama alone
Was the 'Way in' to Him,
And naught else in *Kaliyuga*
Could save him but His name

And he wished to make a present of this *Harinama* to man

His heart broke to leave his beloved Nadia with all its fond associations, to leave his aged mother Sachi Devi and his young and unsuspecting wife Sri Vishnupriya, but there was no way out As the author puts it, even God has His enemies Sri Nimai too had his scoffers They jeered at the young pundit going about gaily, chewing betel, eating heartily, living with a young wife, depriving himself of no comforts and then singing *kirtan* songs at the

head of a band of deluded followers Sri Nimai felt that only a supreme sacrifice would open their eyes and soften their heart and bring contrition Briefly, this was the ideology behind his self immolation

We shall not reproduce the description the author gives of the lord's quietly stealing out of his bed at dead of night, leaving Vishnupriya on it in her innocent sleep, and standing in the open courtyard, with the stars as pensive witnesses in the blue, making his obeisance to the mother and relegating his wife to her and to God, and then turning his back and running straight to the river bank and plunging into the water in the early hours of a cold winter morning Nor how he ran breathless to Katwa, some miles off and was initiated there by Kesava Bharati into the monastic order only under severe pressure of his persuasions, — for the Bharati, though a follower of the cold intellectual school and as such supposed to be freed of all sentiments, had burst into tears at the sight of young Nimai of twenty four summers and at the thought of the endless sufferings of a *sannyasin's* life The scene with the sorrowing barber who had been summoned to shave him clean of his beautiful locks, a ritual which must precede the initiation, is also a picture the author has drawn with all the pathos of a *bhakta's* heart and should be read in the original along with all the heart rending happenings which followed at Katwa and for the next few days at Shantipur, a few miles from Navadweep, where Nityananda had managed to bring him in his ecstatic state, deluding him into the belief that he was being taken to his wished for place, Vrindaban The author concludes this volume with a description of the lord s return to Kulia which faces Navadweep on the opposite bank, five years later, to redeem the promise he had made his mother at Shantipur that he would come to her again Briefly, it is this Thousands are bathing at both the *ghats* of Kulia and Navadweep in the morning sunshine Vishnupriya has come to the Nadia *ghat* to have her dip, escorted by her aged and sorrowing mother-in law, Sachi Devi A six and a half feet tall figure is discerned by her, towering above a crowd of thousands on the Kulia bank opposite, crying *Haribol, Haribol* She could not mistake that unforgettable figure Nearly fainting away, she bursts into a lament

Mother dear, catch hold of me,
or else I fall.
Why at all didst thou bring me
to this Ganges bank?
Behold Kulia across the water,
feeding thy eyes fully
Where lacs of men are thronged,

Shouting *Haribol* around a figure tall
Why is it, mother? Canst thou
the secret tell
Why lacs of men are dancing,
crying *Haribol,*
Shaking the earth below
and rending the skies above?
Methinks thy son shines forth there,
For, dost thou not see that tall
and gracious figure?
Who could he be but thy son and my lord,
my supremest for ever?
His lotus feet,
The sinner and the sick have reached;
Deprived of them,
Stands Vishnupriya alone, bereaved,—
Jeered by her mates as a gross misfit,
Or shunned and forsaken as a thing diseased
Was it to give me, his servant-maid,
Her punishment due,
God hath in him appeared
To purge this *yuga*?

Take me, mother, take me away
From this plaintive place,
Take me with my downcast face
Hidden in thy apron's end,
For, powerless I am to bear the sight,
Whom shall I tell my woes?
On his person of golden hue
A *koupin* he hath donned,
Once more near us drawn,
Mother, by thy love alone
Endless sufferings he hath lifelong borne,
Bring him home, mother,
Now bring him to his own!

My heart is rent
To view this scene,
For man's sorrows and sins
My lord's are sufferings these,

Shame on thee, man, shame on thee,
'Tis thou who hast brought it to be,—
This penance of thy dearest friend,
And shot an arrow through me!

Indeed it was foolish man who brought it to be!

We come now to have a glimpse into the third volume It begins with a beautiful song of the author's own composition bemoaning the infirmities of his declining years and his failing strength He was indeed in very bad health when he was completing the previous volume He had said when concluding it that it grieved him that he could not write on the subsequent *leelas* of the lord, especially the secret *leelas* enacted by him in the inner recesses of his grotto in the company of three and a half of his most select followers, Swarup, Ramananda Rai Sikhi Mahiti and his sister Madhavi Dasi, as it was beyond the little strength then left in him But it was not to be Under Divine dispensation he had to write twice as many volumes as before, even after he had thought that death was at his door The song referred to is somewhat painful reading, revealing as it does the hidden corners of a passionate soul crying in distress In the cold English language it stands thus

Many were the dishes for my lover I cooked,
Aliens came and feasted on them!
The evening descends, the larder is empty,
Nothing is left in my hands
How am I, empty handed,
To appear before my lord?
To cook again, O my *Sakhi*,
No time is left for me,
Nor strength in palsied hands and limbs
Who is so kind would cook for me,
That with viands in my hands
I might his secret bower approach,
And sitting face to face with him,
Feed him to my heart's content?
But how may I now my journey make
With nothing in hand,—luckless me,—
Nothing to place at his lotus feet!

The author then starts with a discourse on the nature of a woman's love for her paramour Two brothers, Sakar Mullick and Dabir Khas, afterwards known as Rupa and Sanatan respectively, ministers of the Mohammedan

ruler of Gaud and virtually themselves the rulers, immensely rich and influential, coming to know of the *Avatar* of Nadia, wrote repeatedly to him, but not coming to him in person, that their miseries in the world were more than they could bear and implored him for relief The Lord reflecting gave vent to the following *sloka*

Parabyasanini nari byagrapi grihakarmani
*Tadebaswadayed antah nabasanga rasayanam ,**

— meaning that a woman of loose character, even when she is engaged in her household work, enjoys in her heart the delicious flavour of a new union Enlarging upon it, the author points out that these two brothers, though engaged every minute in discharging their heavy responsibilities, completely immersed in mundane affairs, were in their heart always tasting of the sweets of a union with their lover, Srikrishna He has regretted the introduction of this simile of a woman's love for her paramour into the sacred precincts of Vaishnava literature but has explained that it has to be understood in the sense in which it has been requisitioned in the absence of a nearer approach to the description of a *bhakta's* passionate love for his lord "Chandidas", the author says, "has avouched that there is greater sweetness, greater fascination in an illicit amour' He endeavours to explain the subconscious reasons behind it A paramour is not within easy grasp like a wedded husband or wife There are difficulties and dangers to overcome, and there is an ever present fear of disappointment which lends glamour to a secret love-adventure If the *inamorato* or *inamorata* is cheaply apprehended and his or her constant companionship is obtained without the restraint of fear or shame, half the pleasure of such a union is lost A husband supposed to have been lost on the high seas returning home after all hopes of him had been given up is far sweeter than the one who is back every evening after his daily round of work Even the husband who returns after a long absence abroad finds a new warmth in his wife's embrace

For a further interpretation of this symbolism of illicit love, it may be added that the worship of God as bridegroom, lord and husband has been recognized as one of the highest forms of wooing Him from ages past, not only in the Hindu and Islamic literature of the East but found abundant expression in the Christian traditions of the West According to Underhill, Plotinus, a Greek philosopher, who flourished even before the advent of Christ, held that "by love He may be gotten and holden, but by thought never" It is *love* that

* परव्यसनिनी नारी व्यापृतापि गृहकर्मणि ।
तदेवास्वदयेद् अन्तः नवसंग रसायनम् ॥

rules, and for a thrilling illustration of the imageries of love, we may turn to the *Song of Solomon* in the Old Testament of the Christians which are no less bold than those found in the songs of Chandidas, Vidyapati, Jayadeva and other Vaishnava *bhaktas* The unknowing purist may condemn the following in the *Song of Solomon* as too tainted with eroticism but not the soul which understands that "our satisfaction lies in submission to the Divine embrace a personal surrender not only of the finite to the Infinite but of bride to Bridegroom, heart to heart" (RUYSBROECK),—which has reached the stage to appreciate "the definitive, irrevocable act, by which permanent union is initiated, a passive and joyous yielding up of the Virgin Soul to its Bridegroom, a silent marriage vow" (UNDERHILL)

In the *Song of Solomon* just referred to, the aspirant thus curries favour with the Lord

Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea pleasant
Also our bed is green

* * *

His left hand is under my head,—
And his right hand doth embrace me

* * *

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth
For thy love is better than wine

Vaishnava poet Jagannath Das sang in the same strain

Behold, my *Sakhi*,
How sleeps our Lady,
Radiant as the moon her face,
Her leg on His leg embracing placed

How is it that in different ages and in distant climes, descriptions of the 'spiritual marriage' between God and man are so strikingly alike?

It was, however, left to the Gaudhya Vaishnavas to boldly go a step forward and to enunciate that even this attitude of adoring God as one's bridegroom and husband fell short of the intensity of passion by which a man or a woman is seized in seeking union with a paramour The acme of love, it is pointed out, is to be found in this latter form of love,—love for one's paramour, because, it is again explained, there is no fear of separation nor of hindrance in the sports of love as between a husband and a wife, while in the other case, in the *parakiya* attitude, there are restraints of all kinds which have to be overcome, prohibitions in many forms which have to be overruled and because in

its exciting experience there is a romance which lends its enchantment to the quest It is the story of the 'Forbidden Fruit' re-told — the impulse to seize what is not easily accessible the instinct of curiosity to explore the hidden, disregarding dangers and courting disasters

The distinction between the two attitudes is illustrated in an old *sloka** which Sri Chaitanya Deva used to recite Its purport was this A young maid had found her sweetheart on the bank of the Nerbuda, swept by a refreshing wind steeped in the fragrance of *Malati* They were afterwards united by a marriage knot The same Nerbuda rippled past, the same moonlight clothed the strand, the same perfume laden breeze came coaxing from the Malaya Hills but to her, it was "not now as it has been of yore", — it was all so dull and stale! The ravishing ecstasy was no more!

Sri Chaitanya Deva s followers did not quite realize its deep significance and he never chose to explain it to them It was Rupa Goswami who embodied its inner meaning in a separate *sloka*† which he composed during his sojourn at Nilachal (Puri) and Sri Gouranga by accident found the script in a part of the Goswami's cottage and going through it clasped Sri Rupa to his bosom, greatly elated by the correct exposition which he himself had withheld from his *bhaktas* Rupa Goswami puts it thus in Sri Radha's mouth

The same are you and the same is me
And the same in newness
As united we live
Yet doth my heart for Vrindaban yearn,
And for the *rashas* of Vrajadham
Tasted with you
Play with me once more
The Vrindaban *leelas* of yore,—
So perchance my heart may fill
With ecstatic bliss

* य कौमारहर· स एव हि वर स्ता एव चैत्र क्षपा
ते चोन्मीलित-मालतीसुरभय प्रौढ़ा कदम्बानिला ।
सा चैवास्मि—तथापि तत्र सुरतव्यापार-लीला-विधौ
रेवारोधसि वेतसीतरु तले चेत समुत्कन्ठते ॥

† प्रिय सोहय कृष्ण· सहचरि ! कुरुक्षेत्र-मिलित
तथाहं सा राधा तद् इदमुभयो सगम सुखम् ।
तथाप्यन्त· खेलन्मधुरमुरली पचमजुषे,
मनो मे कालिन्दी पुलिनविपिनाय स्पृहयति ॥

It has been wisely emphasized that this acme of love in celebacy, this *parakiya rasa*, only Sri Radha and the *gopis* of Vrindaban were privileged to taste It was to be found nowhere outside Vrindaban Even Sri Chaitanya Deva used to say "The most blessed, the most fortunate are the *gopis* The bliss which Lakshmi Devi, the beloved of Narayana, coveted but found not, was easily enough by the *gopis* possessed"

Mira Bai indeed boldly demanded of her Giridharilal

Love me as thou didst love
Radhika, Rukmini,—avowed queens,
Nay, give me a taste of thy secret love,
And love me as thou loved
Vrindaban's *gopis*,—on the sly

And again

Come into my courtyard, friend,
Like the full moon bright,
And flood it with thy perfumed light
Come, riding the chariot of my dream,
And, for a while thy *gopis* forgot,
Give me thy pastoral love,—
The same that Satyabhama
And Chandravali had got

But Mira Bai was one of the *gopis* of Vrindaban, reborn a saint-princess of Rajputana, privileged to make the demand

It is said that Sri Ramkrishna Deva had tasted of this love when he was possessed by Sri Radha This is the description* given of him when he was in the grip of this *mahabhava*:

> "After a short period, however, the *madhurabhava* or the ecstatic emotions of a sweetheart, came upon his mind with a terrific rush and swept it away He looked upon himself as one of the legendary *gopis* or milkmaids of Vrindaban racked by the terrible pangs of separation from their supreme lover, Krishna He fixed himself up in the pose of a *gopi* and began to dress, talk, behave and move about like a faithful young woman sorely distressed by her lover's indifference He went almost mad in his passionate love for his divine sweetheart Krishna, however, went on playing his old tricks with him, just as he had done with the *gopis* He captivated his mind, made it wild with love, and delighted in adding fuel to the fire of this all-consuming passion by keeping himself, all the while, at an inaccessible distance Krishna's cruelty

* *Vide* p 434 of *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol II

stabbed him and he felt as much distressed as the *gopis* The pangs of separation became unbearable and the frenzy of a forlorn lover was upon him He gave up food, sleep, in fact all contacts with the outer world, and urged by his burning passion, roamed ceaselessly in his spiritual dreamland, in a mad pursuit of his wily lover Thus Ramakrishna represented in flesh and blood a complete portrait, found in the Vaishnava scriptures, of Sri Radha, who among the *gopis* displayed through her *mahabhava* the acme of conjugal love for Krishna

"After he had passed for a few months through this terrible ordeal of disappointed love for Krishna, he, however, was blessed one day with a vision of Radha, the peerless exemplar of the *madhurabhava*, and verily the queen of the *gopis* of Vrindaban Radha with her golden complexion and heavenly beauty appeared before him, drew close to him and vanished mysteriously in his body, leaving him engulfed in an ecstatic fit For a period after this he remained identified with Radha, and all the psychic and physical symptoms of her *mahabhava* became manifest in him before the wondering gaze of the Bhairavi, Vaishnav Charan, and other learned devotees

"A few days after this, he came to the end of his heartrending episode The curtain suddenly rose, Sri Krishna with his soul enthralling grace appeared, walked up to him and merged in his person His mad yearning was thus set at rest, and his heart became full of divine bliss The thrill of the vision kept him spell bound for a period of three months, during which he would always see Krishna in himself and in every thing about him, sentient or insentient"

Dumb struck by this manifestation, his *tantric* preceptor, the Bhairavi, "left the place abruptly to dive deep into her spiritual *sadhana* Before departing, she sought Ramakrishna's pardon after having accosted him as an incarnation of Sri Gouranga and decked him with sandal paste and garlands" *

Carnality has no place in *parakiya bhava* or *mahabhava* or, for the matter of that in *swakiya rasa* either, — in the truest form of love as between a husband and his wife The absence of carnality in the love between Sri Ramkrishna and his married wife is too widely known Some blatant fools "incapable of catching a grass snake and wanting to catch the cobra", as the Bengali saying goes, either unknowingly or deliberately misinterpreted the philosophy underlying the *parakiya rasa* and adulterated a pitcherful of delicious cream with a drop of poison

Lastly, it can perhaps be said without a fear of criticism that the *parakiya* is an attitude that has to be reached by *sadhana* rather than by a pose to be taken with the accompaniment of any external practices in which the senses participate

* Swami Nirvedananda in *The Cultural Heritage of India* Vol II, p 504

We have digressed far But this was necessary in order to fully elucidate the inner meaning of *parakiya rasa*, which is to be found in the highest phase of ecstatic love for God which the author of *Amiya Nimai Charit* in the first few pages of this third volume sought to explain, rendering himself liable to be misunderstood in the absence of the exposition he has furnished How often have the hidden meanings of divine *leelas* been misunderstood and misinterpreted! When Krishna stole the *gopis'* clothes on the bank of the Jamuna and climbed up the *Kadamba* in hiding, it was a test of their love, a test of their protestations of absolute surrender unto Him a supreme test revealing the highest philosophy of love Had the *gopis* surrendered all their possessions to Him — their life and soul their body and their mind their lineage and name their kinsfolk and their shame? Were they awake to anything else but Krishna? Was there any room left in their heart or in their mind for any other thought, any other object in the physical or intellectual sphere except Krishna? If there was not, how could any such thought find room in their mind, as they came out of the water, that they were nude? How could shame find a place in them? Mad men and women go about in public stark naked Ramkrishna in his state of *samadhi* had no trappings on him The highest order of *sannyasins* have no clothes to cover their shame Complete self abnegation is complete obliteration of all such sense It is a state of perpetual *samadhi*

Returning to our main theme now, we find that the third volume deals extensively with Sri Gouranga's proselytizing tours in South India, the conversion of Basudeva Sarbabhouma a hardened rationalist, the greatest metaphysician of the time, proud of his erudition and with a demonstration of the victory of *Bhakti* over *Jnan* or Reason The volume ends with his return to Nilachal where his *bhaktas* from Navadweep flock to pay their homage

The fourth volume deals with the lord s *leelas* from the twenty seventh to the thirtieth year of his life and ends with an account of his visit to Navadweep and his last meeting with Sachi Devi and Sri Vishnupriya which was just five years since he had left his home on a cold winter night, renouncing *samsara* and entering the monastic order A reference has already been made to his appearance at the Kulia *ghat* in the first instance But his visit to his home and homeland and to his mother and bereaved Vishnupriya was such a pathetic scene of parting and renunciation that we cannot help reproducing in a general way the author's description of it as given in the concluding pages of this volume The lord stood on the public road facing his house, surrounded by a crowd of thousands Vishnupriya's eyes rested on him through the slit of her half-opened window leaves She knew too well it was the last look of him,

never again to be had in this life The thousands near him and around feasted themselves freely upon his god like form, radiant with love and heavenly pity But she, his other half, who had sold herself at his feet was to have only a surreptitious look and from far, as though she was a creature to be despised and shunned, not privileged to a near approach to him,—his lord, husband and protector! There was indeed a bar As a *sannyasin* the lord was not to cast his eyes on a woman's face Vishnupriya knew it There was the further bar of *purdah* How could she come out on the public road thronged by thousands of strangers? But in an instant all barriers broke before her surging passion She lost control on her outward senses and swept out of her room, veiled from head to foot in a cloth half dirty, hâlf torn, she had on — swept straight through the crowd which gave way to her to the spot where the lord had stood and fell prostrate at his feet with a shrill cry of anguish The lord noticing it was a woman, stepped back a little and questioned who she was Not on the lips of any one of the thousands present was the answer It was she herself who spoke ' I am thy slave of slaves, my lord ' There was no mistaking the voice Suppressing emotions, the lord asked "What is it you seek?" The answer came "All creatures of the three worlds have been reclaimed by the lord but his lifelong slave, Vishnupriya alone, is left to flounder in the mud of a polluted well"

Then as though a sheaf of arrows had shot forth and pierced a thousand hearts, an uproar of rending grief rose from the vast multitude Only two persons remained outwardly unmoved, the lord and Vishnupriya He then, bending his head on her, spoke in the gentlest tone "Vishnupriya! Be true to your name and from now on, be you '*Krishna priya*' '

Vishnupriya "But I see not Krishna, my lord, save and except in thee ' The lord stood mute for a moment and then said to her "Arise, holy woman! A *sannyasin* has no possessions and can offer nothing But take these mine wooden sandals and keep them They will take away from you the stings of my separation and quench its flame"

The Great Woman made her obeisance to the two wooden footwear, kissed them with her mouth and with tears rolling down her face held them to her breast

A thousand throats in chorus cried — *Haribol, Haribol!*

This fourth volume is replete with descriptions of the tumult which the lord raised by the manifestation in him of the *mahabhava* of Sri Radha, deluging the country with *bhakti rasa* To try to summarize them within the bounds imposed on us would be a sacrilege Even the author of this book of

over two thousand pages has apologized at one place that he had only collected the bricks and mortar leaving it to someone more blessed to build up the edifice

The fifth volume begins with the lord's farewell to Navadweep and his return to Nilachal after a futile endeavour to proceed to Vrindaban straight from there — futile because he was embarrassed by thousands having taken the road with him, impelled by their love This was not the right way of making a journey to ' the country of the Soul ' where the pilgrim goes

> By night, secure from sight,
> And by a secret stair, disguisedly

and Sanatan Goswami warned him that he would miss all the enchantment if he went there with such an army of adherents So he turned back and directed himself to Nilachal It was after a while spent with Sri Sri Jagarnatha that he went to Vrindaban and on his way back from there drew into his fold Prakashananda Saraswati the renowned follower of the Mayavadi School of unsurpassing erudition and owning ten thousand disciples, of which a mention has been made at a previous place The lord spent the remaining eighteen years of his sojourn on this earth at the shrine of Jagarnatha This volume describes graphically the relations between God and His *bhaktas*, between the Loved One and the lover, with many illustrations of the devotee s influence over Him through sheer force of love

Discoursing on the Religion of Love as preached by Sri Gouranga, the author is awakened to the political degeneration of his country and breaks into a passionate appeal " When this Religion of Love takes a firm root in this country, all distinctions of caste, colour and creed and of the higher and lower order of society and all dissensions arising therefrom will disappear Then only will Bharata be reborn with all her glories of the past and carry her banner high amongst the nations of the world " It was this inborn religious bias which had inspired all his political activities during the preceding fifty years of his life

When Shishir Kumar was about to finish the fifth volume, he was in an extremely debilitated condition through age and sicknesses He often felt he had only a few more days to live He had not the strength left in him to let him hope that he would be able to complete his life s work by describing the *leelas* of the last twelve years of the lord s life which it was one of his last passionate desires to do He felt it as a great misfortune His heart hankered for it but his body and mind did not promise to co-operate In the depth of this sorrow, he composed a poem giving a vent to his pent up feelings which finds a place in the introduction to the sixth volume and of which the following is a free English rendering

Life was easy, no bother
To mar its tranquil course
When Gour I had not known
But from the day his name
Into my ears had found its way,
Sorrow, bred of distrust and fear,
Made of my heart a nest

My comrades bless'd,—
One by one they left,—
Left me all alone
Whom could I tell my woes?
Who is now here to share my grief,
And shed his tears with me,
Discoursing heart to heart,
In one chord attuned?

He came,—stealing into my heart, my Gour,
Awhile he rested there,
And now I find that stealing it,
He is fled!

'Twas he that beckoned unto me,
Gestures made and temptations cast,
Till at last my mind was caught
By both his arms — and clasped
And then deserting me,
Making of me an outcast,
He fled, leaving me deflowered.

Now in pursuit of him I run,
And scenting it, the faster he runs,
And in my failing strength
Far behind I lag,
Forgetful of self,
Panting for breath,—
And seeking rest

My limbs fail,
My strength has left,
I fear I'll drop

O for some kinsman kind,
For love and pity's sake,
To give me now a lifting hand!
In the failing light of the setting day,
The earth seeks leave,
Her farewell waves!

"Many months have passed since", the author proceeds to say, and we shall let him say as far as possible in his own words why he let many months pass before he ventured on this most difficult chapter of Gouranga *leela*,—the exposition of the *leelas* of Sri Radha-Krishna, in the select inner circle of 'three and a half" of his *bhaktas*, (1) Swarup Goswami, (2) Ramananda Rai, (3) Sikhi Mahiti and his sister Madhavi Dasi who, as a woman, counted as one-half "Many months have passed since the above poem was composed During this period, countless friends, out of their kindness to me, asked me to write the *leelas* of the last twelve years of the lord They said they had read the five volumes through and through but their hunger remained unsatisfied, seeking to taste the rest To some I said that I was too weak and infirm to undertake it, and to others that I had derived my sustenance so far, repasting on the remains of the food which the *mahajans* had tasted and if those eminent *bhaktas* did not describe the last *leelas*, who was I to enter into that domain? To more intimate friends and relations I confided that the mere wish for it could not help one to write those *leelas* One needed the necessary emotional urge and the power to give expression to his thoughts and sentiments and they were not in me I had not also the training to make a good Bengali writer So, in my anxiety and earnestness to have the lord's *leelas* as well written and delineated as possible, I had asked several Bengali writers of repute to take up this work but no one agreed Then it seemed as if I was being whipped at my back and goaded to take it up myself That is how and why I came to write upto the fifth volume

"Apart from these, there was another reason, the real reason, which made me fly back from this task of writing the *leelas* of the last twelve years as often as I wished to take it up In the previous five volumes I had described nearly all the *leelas*, save and except the secret *leelas* during the last twelve years of the lord's life, known generally as the *gambhira leela* I feared it was beyond my powers to put them on paper. Just imagine that out of thousands, the lord could find only three and a half persons sufficiently endowed with the quality to understand and appreciate their meanings. And it took twelve long years for these three and a half select devotees to enter into and taste the mysteries of the love romance in the sports of Radha-Krishna And how did

the lord himself help them to it? The fact is that during all these twelve years he was always in a state of abstraction At no time was he the ordinary man alive to the outer world, not even the Nimai or Gouranga of Nadia. It was in this state that he described the *leelas* of Radha-Krishna to these select *bhaktas* But again, how? Not by sitting down to interpret by words and phrases but in a different way Suppose there are two *bhaktas*, each trying to explain the taste of the nectar of God's love as experienced by him One of them like a first class dramatist has recourse to beautiful wordy descriptions replete with similes and metaphors and parables and the like, in an unending procession, and goes on from hour to hour making heroic efforts at giving the correct picture The other proceeding on this adventure goes a short way and his tongue begins to fail, his lips to tremble, his throat is choked and lastly he shakes in a tremor and no more words come out of his mouth Whose description goes into the heart and who succeeds? Of course the latter

"So, the lord did not write out a learned discourse and read it out to them nor did he, like the first of the two *bhaktas*, describe the *leelas* in words But as stated above, he was in a state of trance at all times and when in this state, he was possessed now by Krishna crying for Radha and demonstrating the love he bore her, and the next moment possessed by Radha crying in distress being unable to bear his separation and cursing Kubja who had kept him chained at Mathura by her love and so on At another time the *bhakta* appears in him and he gazes intently at his own feet, goes into raptures and kisses them or wipes them with his hair What was he then in such a state, a *bhakta*, or Krishna or Sri Radha? Even his three and a half select ones were puzzled It was Sri Swarup Goswami who tried to give an explanation in a couple of *slokas* of which the purport ran thus In days of yore Radha and Krishna figured before the world separately as two But now they were fused into one and thus one figure was the Lord Gouranga And why was this fusion? Because the lord felt that he had shown when possessed by Krishna, how to love Radha, and he had shown, when possessed by Radha, how passionately she had loved Him Comparing the two, Sri Krishna had felt that Radha's love for him was a thousand times more intense and passionate than the love with which he adored her His love for her was nothing compared to her love for him For him to have the fullest taste of Radha's love, even when not losing his identity as Krishna it was necessary for Him to unite with Her, to be one-half of Her, and for Her to be one half of Him,—the Two fused into One It was this *mahabhava* in the fusion which Lord Gouranga sought to demonstrate to his little inner circle of three and a half *bhaktas*, and even they, as just stated, did not at first know what to make of him, how to interpret

his threefold or fourfold attitudes, as a *bhakta*, as Sri Krishna, as Sri Radha, and crowning all, as Radha and Krishna blended into one"

After having explained why he did not readily take up the sixth volume, the *bhakta* author goes on to state why, even with a full sense of the difficulties, he did, after all, undertake it In his previous five volumes he had described most of the lord's *leelas* He felt it was necessary to add certain explanations to them and to point out to certain inevitable inferences derivable from them, for the benefit of the non *bhakta* class,—nay, the atheists who denied the existence of God "It was all very good", the author argues, "for select *bhaktas* to dive deep into the sea of nectar and have a taste of it But there was a class of men who were impervious to all that was outside the range of reason and intellect It was necessary for their satisfaction and possibly in their interest to discuss if there was any historical or logical background on which I had taken my stand in giving my narratives and which might appeal to them I will try to show that Faith and Reason are two entirely distinct agencies God can be realized by faith He cannot be proved by reason He has not been so proved as yet It is said that some blessed souls have come in direct contact with Him,—have seen Him with their eyes of flesh But that by itself does not convince the non believer' This is only too true The non-believer wants to force His discovery by Reason and not "by Faith to love Him, by Faith to be devoted to Him, by Faith to enter into Him,—to be incorporated in His member' (St Augustine) He forgets that "by Faith He is nearer, by Reason very far", that there is a mystery in Creation which we cannot penetrate, that "there is the unknown, the reserve of truth, which the intellect cannot reach and yet feels to lie behind,—there is an incomprehensible certainty which is not to be explained by grammer or logic" (Sir Sarvapalli) He forgets that "the men of experience feel the presence of God and do not argue about it" Sri Ramkrishna Deva of recent memory was one such man of experience

Yet, the intrepid Shishir Kumar says he would enter into the cobwebs of Reason and try to establish that (1) God exists, (2) He is kind and loving and nothing else and (3) that He comes into this world of ours from time to time in human form and lives with us,—to prove His existence and His love for man Intrepid indeed was Shishir Kumar,—intrepid ever,—from his boyhood till his day of death at the age of 72!

For our part, we are not so intrepid as to venture on a discussion of the contents of this sixth volume or to dive into the mysteries sought to be fathomed in its three hundred pages Those who feel interested will peruse

them with the close attention demanded by the subject for its comprehension The author throws the challenge "Let them dissect and press my reasonings with their utmost unkindness, for I shall not feel hurt by it, for untruth is destroyed by the impact of such assaults and truth only comes out a hundred-fold brighter My only entreaty to them with my joined palms is that in this process of defending their position or attacking the bastions of the other side, they may not part company with charity and fairplay"

With an introduction like this, he started on his excursion into the hidden sanctuaries of *Dwapara* where Krishna and Radha had love sported By the time this excursion came to a close, came also the finale of his life's drama It was the last Act played The curtain dropped on the day he had finished his *Amiya Nimai Charit*

CHAPTER X

IN DREAMLANDS

KALACHAND-GITA OR HYMNS TO KRISHNA

'KALACHAND GITA' has not met with that enthusiastic reception from the reading public in Bengal which *Amiya Nimai Charit* did The reasons may be one or more of these Romanticism has captured the modern reader and *Amiya Nimai Charit* is an enthralling romance On the other hand, *Kalachand-Gita* is a lay scripture, a book of hymns, a canticle, a hosanna to the living lord which makes all the difference for the new cravings It needs the mind to enter into the mysteries of creation and the sense to appreciate the searching inquiries into man's relations with God which the poet-author has tried to disentangle from a cobweb of riddles The language is homely like that of Kirtibas's *Ramayana* and Kasiram Das's *Mahabharata* which does not appeal to the new taste generated in the growth of Bengali literature It lacks in subtleties of expression demanding intellectual excursions into their hidden meanings which the adventurous reader delights in It is not a wreath of glistening pearls displayed in the jeweller's show-room but a garland of flowers culled from forests, not the Taj Mehal of a thousand architects, 'a dream in marble',—of the mind, but a flowery bower in the half lighted glades of a primeval forest wove by one Supreme Hand,—a dream of the soul,—where the reader is led to withdraw or to remain To make an inroad into the realms of Vidyapati and Chandidas, of Kabir and Dadu, of Nanak and Buddha is an intellectual treat To return from the expedition with hoarded treasures as trophies of victory is a privilege of the blessed In reviewing a little book on the saint-princess Mira Bai, the *Light of the East*, a monthly organ of the Church of Rome, in its issue of October 1945 commented grievously "What a pity it is that books which foreign troops found displayed before their eyes in our book-stores have so often been of the type of the *Kama-Sutras* instead of the various books published by

'Wanderer' How much India's reputation abroad would have gained if she had thus been presented to these unexpected visitors at her best and not at her worst" Another reason, though of minor significance for its inadequate appreciation has been the absence of a full and proper introduction into its heavy contents which has been largely made up for, by an elaborate Index to its English translation *In Quest of Bliss* published of late styled 'A Repertory' *

Kalachand-Gita was published a little earlier than *Amiya Nimai Charit* or in any case before its last few volumes in which a reference to it is found The author, was not sanguine of a kind reception and hesitated to publish it It remained a manuscript for good many months until a youth who had just found an entry in the family circle came to pay him a visit in the year 1893 at Ranigunge where Shishir Kumar was sojourning to repair his health The youth lived with him in the same bungalow Shishir Kumar got him to read the manuscript to him every morning at the break of day when all was still in that quiet little place Before the youthful reader had proceeded very far, his eyes were blurred and his voice chocked, making it difficult for him to read on After three or four days' sitting, Shishir Kumar said 'I have tried the experiment I shall publish it now' Before long the manuscript was in the printer's hands

This was the story preceding its publication A more interesting story is the one preceding its composition — how he found his inspiration in a little flower 'dipped in Nature's loveliest hue' on the summit of a lonely hill at Deoghar This had better be narrated in the words of his worthy brother Motilal, as given in the preface to the book

"The background of *Kalachand-Gita* is this The material world is the manifestation of God By closely viewing the same, the author draws a picture of the Creator He finds Him endowed with infinite love, and love alone He does not resort to abstruse philosophical reasonings to prove his conception of God and His attributes but derives his inferences straight from what is manifested to him in creation and goes on to depict God s love and anxious care for man and man's relations with Him and with his fellow men Thus, when a simple flower, tiny in size but dipped in Nature's loveliest hue caught the author's eye on the summit of a lonely hill, he thought of the Great Artist whose incomparable, inimitable production it was and he thought of man who, in the hurry and bustle of the world, went treading upon it, not even caring to cast a glance at it It was then and there that the author composed the following lines in his mind, the first germ of a charming production

* *Vide* Appendix

This pretty wild flower,
Lovely beyond compare,
He hid it in the grass
Alas, for men who come and go,
In world's strife busy so,
They never do care to glance (*Translated*)

"Not long after, the author witnessed an incident between a male and a female owl which evoked the feeling in him that the Great Author of the universe must be a superb humorist, an aesthete and an arch-artist, the kindest and loveliest These two incidents inspired the production of the story of 'Rasha Rangini', the first of the five '*Sakhis*' who narrate the different stories of their lives And from time to time he wrote the other portions, hardly conscious that there was a pervading spirit which bound them together as one whole'

The faith by which the author was forced into writing this book, his source of inspiration, is revealed in the following song composed by him, presenting a picture of God sorrowing over man's forgetfulness of Him

Fonder than my life is my love for him,
Yet, too well I know that he loves me not;
I shall wait and see,
At what distant date,
He remembereth me
As the thirsty rain-bird towards the clouds doth look
For a drop to fall,
So do I for him expectant wait,
Viewing the long road that stretches before me
Ages have come and gone,
Times unborn and eternal
Have come and rolled
Into the abyss of the past,
Yet, forgotten, unknown to him,
I have lived, still waiting for him,
Like one whose sap of life was dried,
And life itself was withered

He wanders here and there,
I am ever at his back,
Never forgetful of him,
And ever keeping him

Before my watchful eyes
Yet he turns not once
To cast a glance at me,—
His lifelong friend (*Translated*)

What heartache and what passion lay hidden behind this song of a sorrowing God! Speaking for Him, the author cries "I am ever at his back." And speaks the 'Voice of Love' to Mechthild of Megdeburg "I chased thee, for in this was My pleasure, I captured thee, for this was My desire, I bound thee and I rejoice in thy bonds" He chases, He captures and He binds He will not let you flee And man evades, eludes and takes to the dark lane to slink away like a thief and, if caught up, turns round with a challenge A more forceful picture of God's 'chasing' of man is rare to find than the one which Francis Thompson gives in *The Hound of Heaven* (so is God described by him), in which, in the words of Underhill, Thompson "describes with an almost terrible power, not the self's quest of adored Reality, but Reality's quest for the unwilling self He shows to us the remorseless, tireless seeking and following of the soul by the Divine Life to which it will not surrender. the inexorable onward sweep of 'this tremendous Lover', hunting the separated spirit, 'strange piteous futile thing' that flees Him 'down the nights and down the days'"

Has God no cause for sorrows? Does He cry for the toy of a top or a kite?

The reader will find at more than one place in this book a picture of God in tears, sorrowing over His unrequited love We shall refer to only one such where *Sakhi* Sajal Nayana (the Tear-Eyed maiden) asks of Him

I beseech, my lord, say what grief is thine
Dark is thy moon like face,
Thy flute is on the earth prostrate,
What grief is thine, my lord?

Tears are in thine eyes,
There's tremor on thy lips,
What pain is in thy heart, my lord?
Thine eyes are tear inflamed,
For whom dost thou weep, my lord?

From the remotest past, *bhaktas* have found that God does weep and cry like us For, if we have our sorrows, He too has His

The book opens with a *sādhu* in the forest where he had repaired in remorse to spend his life in Divine meditation so as to reach His Kingdom His disconsolate young wife follows him there with her newborn babe in her arms

and with joined palms implores him to return home The *sadhu* asks her to leave him alone The wife holds up the babe to him and speaks appealing "Behold thou, here in my arms this child that gazes at thee and harken to his call" It was a lovely babe, like spring's first blossom, hardly ten and two months old The *sadhu s* heart is moved, for a while the infant triumphs Afraid of a complete victory, he quickly restores him to his mother's arms A discussion follows, between him and her, as to the merits of his retreating into the forest to find his salvation, deserting his wife and child In the midst of it, the infant intercedes and, as though in support of her pleadings, lisps out,— '*Ba a ba*' Once again the *sadhu* is moved The selfless wife asks the infant not to disturb him in his meditation Presently she runs away to find some milk for the husband who was apparently starving himself to death She holds the milk to his lips and asks him (sitting with his eyes closed) to drink it He drains it off, still with eyes closed His wife's fealty and loving offices melt his heart and set him thinking ' Alas! how sweet is the bond of love He has made Without food I lie here feeling no pangs of hunger, yet the woman is disconsolate and cannot rest at home He who could create this lovely kinship, alas, how can He be cruel Himself?" He continues to muse on this line and feels puzzled by the apparent inconsistencies in His creation and in His relations to man Many questions arise in his mind to which he finds no satisfactory answers, such as, what was the shape and form of God, was He cruel or kind and above all what relationship should be formed with Him to be able to worship Him from the heart and to make Him one's own In course of this reverie, he becomes unconscious and beholds in a dream a vision of five fair maidens assembled in a charming wood We shall describe the dream as given in *Kalachand Gita* and translated in *In Quest of Bliss*·

"On a bed of the sweetest flowers, under the canopy of the fragrant *Madhavi*, lay a maiden fair, her youth and beauty beyond compare radiating all that was charming and all that was sweet in the universe Prostrate she lay in a trance, and by her a damsel sat, the fairest of faces, watching with wistful eyes the emotions that rippled on her face And three more of their kind came, one after another, from whence none could say, etherial beings ushered into the earth that took their shapes—and many a curious glance went forth from each and all, in mute surprise and joy Each to the rest unknown, by chance at one place thrown, all eyes on the unconscious girl unknown, and all concerned to bring her back to life And she, her senses slowly gained, scans them all, her lips parted as if to speak, but anon they closed, as if in maidenly coyness in strangers' midst her speech she lost Rolling in the wealth of youth and beauty, askance they looked and many a loving glance exchanged and felt like tied by eternal bonds of love

"And one of them the erstwhile unconscious maiden thus addressed 'Who art thou, darling fair, and how didst thou thy senses lose? How camest thou in this forest deep and whose heart dost thou illumine? And thy lord, where does he live? On thy face plays a glee which, methinks, speaks for thee — that thy lord thou hast found'

"The maiden blushed and softly she asked them, whom with bewildered love she scanned 'Maidens fair, enchantresses of the world, pray, who are you all? In mercy tell me' And once again many a curious glance was exchanged, and one of them Rasha Rangini her name her story did unfold, while the rest with rapt attention lent their ears"

And then the other four *sakhis*, Kangalini, Kula-Kamini, Prem Tarangini and Sajal Nayana, give each her own story These five narratives of the five *sakhis* constitute the life and soul of the book, inimitable treasures for the aspirant seeking to worship God in any of the five forms of approaching Him, *Aisvarya, Madhurya, Dasya, Sakhya,* Vatsalya After the last *sakhi* had finished her story, an ascetic appears there, his head clean shaven, a loin cloth on his person, and the words *Hari-Krishna* imprinted all over his body "Struck by the vision of the maidens and the love and beauty they radiated, the ascetic stopped The maidens bowed low and in chorus cried 'Sri Krishna-bereft — we are seeking Him in this wood Canst thou O Ascetic, tell us how and where to get a sight of Him?' He scanned their looks and said with tears in his eyes 'Ye silly girls! He whom a thousand years of penance and prayers would not reveal even to the mind's eye, could He be found by threading garlands, pleasantly seated in a bower?' ' And again "By fasts and privations you shall emaciate yourselves, and then will be His grace on you The more your bodies thin, the more will be His grace" And yet again "Forgo your fondness for your hair and shave your heads bare Before the sacred *Tulasi* bow and beat your heads till they bleed, and then will Krishna, our Father, be pleased" The *sakhis* exchange meaning glances with one another and shoot their repartees, each in her own way, which completely knocks him down and to make it short, in the end he springs to his feet and dances, crying in one voice with the five *sakhis*, '*Hari! Hari!*', lost to himself

By this time the dream dissolves The *sadhu*, now conscious and awake, ponders over all he had seen and heard in his dream "I have known all' he communes "Knowledge is mine now, but of what avail is knowledge if His presence is denied to me?" And then, aloud as from a heart cleft in twain the prayer went forth 'Show Thyself, Thou Saviour of *bhaktas*! Here I seat

myself in *yoga*, invoking Thy presence, and here I remain fixed, until either Thou dost manifest Thyself or I perish"

The Presence was not denied The Great One revealed Himself, at first in a flame of splendour as from a million moons, blinding the *sadhu's* vision, and then in human form, face to face, His eyes meeting the *sadhu's* with all the fondness of a lover or a friend or a father

* * *

The *denouement* came the *sadhu* returned home, clasping his infant son to his breast

And now, dear reader, we too beg leave of you to return home, having tarried dangerously long with the *sakhis*, and pleased that we did not lose ourselves in that enchanted wood

And if we add one more word, with all the risk of tiring you out, it is only to say that the pictures wrought in this book describing the various phases through which doubting man struggles until Faith comes to his rescue are but the pictures of the author's own experiences in life It is amply borne out by the author's own account of them contained in the introductions to the first two volumes of *Sri Amiya Nimai Charit*, of which summaries have been given in previous chapters *Kalachand Gita* would not have been the jewel of a book it is, if it had not been the revelations of a questing soul fraught with doubts and fears, which finds peace at last in Faith

CHAPTER XI

AT THE FEET OF HIS LORD

THE shadows of eventide were descending on Shishir Kumar He had forebodings of it He had heard the whirr of his chariot

He had his weakness for a particular song which proclaimed that Nityananda was always present with pitcherfuls of Radha's love to dole out to all who came to seek it In the early morning hours of the day of which we are now speaking, he said his prayers and did his *bhajan* as usual, and then flung himself into a frenzy of joy, as he chanted his favourite song with a strange new fervour

Nitai calls,— "Come one, come all,
Come and take ye Radha's love",
Nitai beseeches,— "Come ye all",
Gour entreateth,— "Come one, come all"
And together they dole out her love
In pitcherfuls large,—
Yet their stock never falls short

When Dr Prio Nath Nundy, his intimate friend and physician, came to see him that morning, he asked the doctor to examine his pulse The doctor found it normal and said that he was quite well and there was not even a trace of the cold he had contracted Shishir Kumar smiled. "You say I am quite well? All right, but when you come to see Tushar in the afternoon, we two shall not meet" The doctor told him that he did not presume to contradict him but he thought that he had yet a few more years to live

He took his midday meal surrounded by his dear ones, gossiping with them as usual Then he sat down to correct the final proof of the last forme

of the last volume of *Amiya Nimai Charit* and on finishing it, he passed it on with the words "My work is finished today"

He then reclined on a bolster placed at his back His youngest daughter, Suhas Nayana, his constant nurse and caretaker, sat by her father. He inquired of her if all inmates of the house had taken their meals Being assured that they had, he seemed to feel some peace The next moment his face wore an expression of contentment and cheer He closed his eyes, as he often did to dose off After a minute or two spent in the same reclining position he pointed his fore-finger heavenward and uttered a loud cry "Nitai Gour Suhas felt alarmed What meant this? — she asked herself Other members of the family rushed in At the first sight they thought he was dosing But in an instant they realized that he had left for ever And so had he done clinging to his Lord upto his last moment and calling unto Him with his last breath for a refuge at His feet Even the unbeliever will say that he had found it

Then came the bier and the cortége and the funeral with *Harinam* from a thousand throats acclaiming his flight unto Him

Thus ended the life and career of a man who had loved his country and loved his God with a faith not lost in tempests nor shaken by doubts and fears

He left behind his next brother Motilal and the youngest, Golap Lal, both of whom have since joined their *Shejdada* The writer of *Memoirs of Motilal Ghosh* has said that when people came to offer their condolence to Motilal on his brother's death he told them that they were "like two flowers on the same stalk and now that one of the flowers had fallen, the other would also wither away day by day" It was indeed a very great blow to him His sorrow, he said, was "too deep too sacred for utterance" He gave expression to it in these words in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of the 12th January 1911. "They talk of conjugal love, parental love, filial love, to us a brother's love is the supremest gift of God,— the Fountain of all love To lose a brother is to feel as if the heart were crushed out of shape Babu Shishir Kumar Ghosh, however, was not only a brother to us born of the same parents but a life-companion, a constant, almost a daily companion of over sixty years to whom we owe every little good thing that we possess, at whose feet we learnt the A B C of politics and a higher life,— who taught us not by precepts alone but by example also that the highest destiny of man was to love God and love man He was our temporal and spiritual Guru"

On the death of Motilal Ghosh in 1922, the *Indian Daily News* observed: "Shishir Kumar, Motilal and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* were inseparably mixed up They grew together, prospered together and suffered together" It would be unjust to the memory of both such brothers if a biographical sketch of either of them did not take sufficient notice of the qualities of the other It is, therefore, due to the memory of Motilal to say unambiguously in this sketch that he proved a most worthy disciple of his revered brother, nay, in some respects he excelled his guru On the latter's retirement from public life, when the full share of an editor's responsibility came to rest on Motilal, he rose into prominence in no time as one of the front-rank journalists in India When he passed away, obituary notices described him variously as "a veteran knight of freedom" *, as "one of the most interesting and stalwart figures of the Indian National Renascence" †, as "perhaps the most remarkable personality in Bengal" ¶, as "a man strangely gifted who had achieved tremendous reputation" §, as one "who will hold an honoured place in the history of Indian freedom" ** His death was preceded by a prolonged and painful illness unlike that of Shishir Kumar who ate his lunch as usual and, prepared for the journey, walked across the borderline

On the death of Motilal, the editorship devolved on the youngest brother, Golap Lal Ghosh, ably assisted by Piyush Kanti Ghosh, the eldest son of Shishir Kumar The latter, who may have, with the talents he possessed, adorned the editorial chair after his uncle Golap Lal, died untimely in 1928 while Golap Lal himself, after a long spell of illness, followed his brothers into the other world in 1934

Shishir Kumar had married twice We have noticed that his first wife died early in his life She had left behind a son, who too died soon after his mother These two bereavements gave him the first taste of sorrow which finds an expression in his book *Kalachand Gita* ‡ From his second wife, he had six sons and two daughters of whom three sons had preceded him and two sons and the two daughters have since followed him. Out of these eight children, only

* Prof. T L. VASWANI

† The *Servant*

¶ The *Statesman*

§ The *Englishman*

** The *Young India*

‡ And thus it was that when I loved
A being that was near my heart
A hand unseen him rudely snatched
And caused a void which made me mad
In Quest of Bliss, p 70

one is now left, Srijut Tushar Kanti Ghosh, the youngest of them all, who succeeded Golap Lal as the editor on the death of the latter Since assumption of this office he has, by his perseverance and organizing ability and, above all, by his innate kindliness and amiable temperament worthy of being emulated, won the love and esteem of a large staff and raised the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* to a pinnacle not dreamt of by its founders when they made their debut with a wooden printing machine acquired with jubilation for the modest sum of rupees thirty two

Of the many tributes paid to the memory of Shishir Kumar, some will be found in the Appendices We bring this memoir to a close with an oblation to the departed great, from a grandson of his, then a boy of sixteen in the intermediate class of a college which found a place in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of the 19th January 1911

Far in the streets of Nadia
With citizens strewn o'er,
Loud grows the sacred name,
The holy name divine
All the world doth weep in grief,
Lapped in eternal pall,
And melancholy sweeps the earth,
And hides the shine of sun

Centuries gone they wept,
For One so dear and great,
Their tears washed the mist that hung
On man and beast,—
And oft the muffled bells did toll
In sacred shrines
Where His sacred songs were sung

Gone is the silvery moon
Behind the shaded west,
Whole night the stars did trace
Her milky waning wake,
Save one, who, twinkling, yet held
The firmament's crest,
And lit the tottering path
Of the reveller and the rake

So thou, whose silver trumpet on the moor
Echoes no more,
Hast sought repose
In the peaceful arms of Death,—
Hast ceased thy muster call
On the barren, barren shore,
And art gone where our cry of anguish
Essays to reach in vain.

Champion of India's fated cause
From morn of life to eve,
Brave knight of valour unpaid,
Be thou sung in ballad and in rhyme,
And thy merited crown receive,
For thy mission divine,
In a better land of eternal peace,
And of tender love sublime.
Sweet are the strains that came
From the writer's busy pen
And gave us a second *Gita*,
And a life of Navadweep's star.
Melodious bird of sweet symphony,
When wilt thou reappear?

But nay, my heart rebels in grief,
And, woe to me, stills its beats!
Better for me to wander away
And seek to lull my soul.
Or could I but cast my watery eyes
Once more on thy heavenly countenance bright,
And commune with thee,
To help me turn away
From a melancholy rhyme!
But rest, my maddened soul,
And to His judgment bow.
Revere the dead
Who has found his rest
At the feet of Gour, his Lord,
And his lifelong trusted Friend.
Yet suppress not the tears;
Freely let them fall;

They will wash thy vices all
And Thou, my Lord, whose glorious name
Sing million Vaishnavas yet,
Receive with pride Thy grateful son,
Thy follower staunch,
Who had Thy paeans sung
Even when the End had come!
The golden sun is set,
Yet a lurking hope in heart endures
Again the sun will shine



My love involves the love before,
My love is vaster passion now,
Tho' mix'd with God and Nature thou,
I seem to love thee more and more

Far off thou art, but ever nigh,
I have thee still, and I rejoice,
I prosper, circled with thy voice,
I shall not lose thee tho' I die

TENNYSON

APPENDIX I

TRIBUTES

DURING LIFE-TIME

The following is from the *Indian Daily News* of 30th August 1887 under the caption "The *Somprokash* on the *Patrika*"

Much has been said from time to time about the *Patrika* No doubt, it is occasionally very outspoken, as people cannot well help being when feeling that wrong has been done As to its general character, we take an account from a native contemporary, which has always been regarded as a leading paper in the country It is well to know the motives and inspirations that actuate public men and in that sense, the remarks of the *Somprokash*, which follow, are not without interest "The manner", says the *Somprokash*, "in which our sagacious and farseeing contemporary, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, is serving the country, cannot but call forth our sincere gratitude The Editor of the *Patrika* does not get up monster mass meetings, and then send telegraphic summaries of their proceedings to the daily papers He does not rend the skies by empty speeches In order to intimidate the Indian Government, he does not start on a 'political tour'. He does not join large associations to trumpet out his own fame, or scream out 'Mazzini', 'Mazzini', to dub himself a 'patriot' Neither is he anxious to purchase a name for himself by bringing about empty political agitations In short, he is above all sorts of vanities and empty sounds But his heart bleeds at the sorrow of the *ryots* He is not afraid so to speak, 'to enter into fire and water and succour the distressed' Tales of official oppression make him simply restless He never fails to enter a fearless protest whenever the Government is found to do an act of injustice, and however high the official may be, his misconduct scarcely escapes his lynx eyes and the official is fearlessly exposed He is ever ready to advocate the interests of his educated countrymen in a most vigorous and weighty manner He never hesitates to attack sharply the English policy which makes a distinction between the white and the black In short, he is ready to sacrifice his own private interests for the sake of the welfare of his country Mr Beames, a highly influential official, violated over and over again one of the most salutary rules of the India Government, but no other editor in the country took

notice of it The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* to serve the interests of the public, fearlessly exposed, after a diligent enquiry, the doings of that official, without giving a thought to his own interests for a single moment Many would have kept silent under such circumstances but the patriotism of the Editor of the *Patrika* is of a different type He cares little for personal danger when the good of the country is at stake He does not care for the praise of others, his patriotism is unselfish He has devoted his heart and soul to the cause of his country, and is ready to sacrifice for it That our brother of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* may continue to serve the interests of the country in an unselfish and independent way, is our humble and sincere prayer to God "

The *Hope*, quoting the above from the columns of the *Indian Daily News*, observed

We make no apology in quoting the above from the *Somprokash*, which, we think, very accurately describes the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, who is perhaps one of the best loved and certainly the most misunderstood editors in the country

In every word of the *Somprokash* we concur, and we could add a great deal more from our own personal knowledge, if that same personal knowledge did not assure us that there is nothing the Editor of the *Patrika* so little cares for as the praise of others But we must point out one thing, in order to guard against a possible misapprehension which the above passage in the *Somprokash* may give rise to It is true that the Editor of the *Patrika* hates got up mass meetings, sham agitation, and vapid resolutions that betray love for notoriety and lack of force, but there is no man we have seen in this country, who understands better the value of sound organization, agitation in the proper spirit, and resolutions that mean 'purpose' and are not mere words It is an open secret that the staff of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* were the animating spirit of the Jhinkargacha Ryots' Meeting, perhaps the only agrarian gathering of value that we have had in this part of the country of late, with a peaceful end in view If Shishir Kumar Ghose keeps aloof from 'associations', it is from associations that have no understanding of the first principles of organization and that proceed to undertake government of a country on the strength of quoted sentences and borrowed ideas which they themselves comprehend very little, and their countrymen less No man believes in self government more strongly than the Editor of the *Patrika*, but he understands very well that there can be no self government without internal organization, and that there can be no organization unless the people thoroughly understood one another and knew what they were about He is a genuine Hindu a typical Bengalee, a man of whom any country might be proud and one who commands the love of the largest number in his own It is seldom that he stirs out of his modest home and never dances attendance on the great 'Saheblog', yet his office is a very reservoir of important information, which comes flocking in letters and telegrams from every part of the country, sent by those who know the man best fitted to do justice to them His services to Hindu society need not be recounted here For the last twenty years or more he has been

a strong bulwark of Hinduism against the assaults of go ahead reformers and ambitious revolutionaries, at the same time he has been fully alive to the necessity of reform, and the certainty of it under the forces of modern civilization For whatever he may say now and then in the spirit of retort, he is too intelligent and shrewd a man not to understand that there are elements of good in the civilization which at present rules his country, and that Englishmen could not be what they are today without the conditions of greatness they had in them which we ourselves lack Those who deny him this sense of justice, thoroughly misunderstand him as a man, and though it is not in our humble part to set him right with the public, yet we cannot but feel it a bounden duty to bear testimony, whenever we may, to this part of his character whose existence is often denied by those who ought to know better.

The *Tribune* of Lahore

We earnestly hope, and from the depth of our soul pray to the Almighty Father, that Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose may be soon restored to his health for, India cannot afford to lose him for many a year yet to come His loss would be simply an irreparable disaster to the nation, for, in him we have the truest model of Indian patriot and journalist We have had opportunities of knowing him somewhat intimately, and what has always struck us, when in his presence, is the utter absorption, so to say, of the man in the one thought of the national regeneration of his people But no, he has another and a greater thought in which he has seemed to us to be always absorbed,—it is the thought of his Maker, for, we have never seen him without the name of 'Hari' in his mouth—every evening we have seen him having his *Harisankirtan* in his little garden in his house at Bagh Bazar. But what is rare in India, in Shishir Kumar Ghose his *bhakti*, or love of God, has not swallowed up his reason or made him useless to the world,—it has, on the contrary, taught him to devote himself entirely to the cause of his country He lives the austere life of a *rishi* and his work is ceaseless We have called him the truest model of the Indian patriot and journalist, and we have called him so advisedly He has no humbug about him, he knows no tall talk—he never sees officials—he knows only work, and work in silence and for the people

The *Hindu* of Madras

He is a patriot of rare type,—modest, disinterested, extremely earnest, and never caring for notoriety or titles, he is an exception to the ordinary type of patriotism He can well be looked to by the more aspiring youths of the rising generation as a model to follow

The *Statesman*, April 1888

The lingering and serious illness that led to the retirement of Shishir Kumar Ghose from public life at the latter end of the eighties of the last century, formed the subject of comment in all the leading papers of the day The opinions of some of these journals are given below

"There is no native journal in India, we suppose, upon the merits of which English opinion is so widely divided, as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, published in this city From the Viceroy downwards, we believe, the *Amrita* is read by nearly all classes, but, while some Englishmen can see nothing but sedition in its columns, others judge it with more candour and with a truer discernment of its spirit"

"We should like to say a word or two as to the general character of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the criticisms made thereon in the Anglo Indian press No one who has any personal knowledge of the two gentlemen who, we believe, jointly edit the paper, — the brothers Shishir Kumar Ghose and Motilal Ghose, — can fail to respect them That they frequently write with extreme bitterness, is true, and they will, we hope, forgive our saying that we have on more than one occasion remonstrated privately with them on the subject, as injuring their own cause But can we really give them no excuse for this error? We have known the elder brother for many years, — the younger one not for so long a period, — and we say truthfully that there are probably no two men in India today, for whom we entertain a more genuine respect They are exceptionally able and earnest men, endowed with strong instincts of right and wrong They are not narrow men who merely 'hate the English', but men of broad and generous sympathies, whose nervous temperament makes them peculiarly sensitive to the injustice and brutality of the terms in which our public writers too commonly speak of their countrymen"

The late Mr W S Caine, M P, in his Introduction to *Indian Sketches by Shishir Kumar Ghose*, wrote in 1897

Every educated Indian has heard of the author, Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose, who, for nearly forty years, has been a potent force in Hindu *society, whose metaphysical acumen, versatile talents*, pure patriotism noble character and earnest, consistent piety, have endeared him to all Ben gal In his youth Shishir Kumar Ghose had few of the advantages, now possessed by young Indians His education was local and elementary, and he owes entirely to himself and his extraordinary energy of character, all the intellectual culture he possesses One of his own favourite sayings is, "time is the best gift of God to man", and he has always lived up to this principle From his earliest youth, he has utilized every spare moment, which he has seized in passing to press into his own service, for the improvement of his mind, or to add to that marvellous store of knowledge concerning India and her people, which is the wonder of all

his friends The brothers set the type, printed the paper, made the ink, wrote the copy, all by themselves, Shishir quickly becoming so adept a type-setter that he composed his articles into his stick direct, instead of working them out on paper first

I think Shishir Kumar Ghose may fairly claim the honour of having been conspicuous among the men who first established political associations in India At the time he migrated to Calcutta, native society formed its public opinion under the influence of the British Indian Association, whose leaders were the most brilliant men of their time, but mainly drawn from the landholding and other wealthy classes Shishir Kumar naturally was absorbed into this Association where his wide practical knowledge of mofussil life was of great value Presently, however, he felt himself at variance with his colleagues on the introduction by Sir Fitzames Stephen, of his Criminal Procedure Code, and subsequently still more so, with regard to the income tax which he supported, but which was strongly opposed, as he thought from interested motives, by the British Indian Association His articles in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* attracted to his side a large number of the younger men, resulting in a friendly revolt, and the organization, by Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose of the 'Indian League', a definitely political association, with its headquarters at Calcutta, and branch committees formed at Krishnagar, Barisal, Berhampur, Dacca, and other large towns in the mofussil Its organ was the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and this movement undoubtedly paved the way for the later and more intensely national movement of Indian National Congress

The Indian League is identified in the social and political development of India with many most important reforms notably that of trial by jury and the municipal system, which containing the germs of representative government, led on to the establishment of the elective system municipally as well as in its higher development of elected members of the Provincial and Viceregal Councils Shishir Kumar Ghose was constantly consulted by that brilliant Indian administrator, Sir Richard Temple, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, in drafting the Act which gave effect to the Calcutta Municipality, which he carried in the teeth of the fierce opposition of the British Indian Association and the Anglo-Indian community mainly by the help of Shishir Kumar and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*

There can be no doubt that Shishir Kumar Ghose was the pioneer of technical education in India When the Prince of Wales paid his State visit to India in the year 1875 the leading citizens of Calcutta were naturally anxious to honour so auspicious and memorable an occasion by some substantial and permanent memorial For some time past Shishir had been urging on Sir Richard Temple and the Bengal Government the importance of establishing in the metropolis of India a well-equipped permanent technical college Seizing the opportunity, within five days immediately preceding the landing of the Prince at Calcutta, Shishir succeeded in collecting nearly two lakhs of rupees for this purpose from his wealthy fellow-citizens, and

at a meeting, convened by the Council of the Indian League, over which the Lieutenant Governor himself presided, the Albert Temple of Science was agreed upon, and the Government afterwards voted Rs 8,000 per annum for its maintenance This grant was withdrawn by his successor, Sir A Eden, immediately on taking office

When Lord Lyton's Press Gagging Act was first broached, and it became evident that journals published in the vernacular would be more or less heavily shackled, the brothers Ghose, believing that the Act was specially aimed at their journal, determined that the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, which at that time was printed in both vernacular and English, should in future be published in the English language alone, and the change was effected in a single day with the help of borrowed type,—a very remarkable feat of journalism At first, the circulation fell off terribly, as might be expected, but the brilliant editing of the paper by Shishir Kumar Ghose, who almost killed himself by hard work and anxiety, quickly brought it back to its old issue, and eventually far beyond it, until it became the most influential newspaper in Bengal, and probably in all India, where it circulates from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin For thirty years it has been one of the most potent factors in Indian society and politics, and during that period there has been no solid and lasting reform, which does not owe much to its influence and advocacy To my mind, it is the most courageous and outspoken journal in all India It is read by the Viceroy and his Council, and is alike the organ of Indian prince and Indian peasant

It cannot be denied that the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* has often written bitterly, nay, savagely, with regard to many acts of the Government, and specially on what its editor considered acts of injustice and harshness on the part of individual administrators But no candid Englishman can read the articles, which are gathered together in this volume, without realizing that they are not written by a mere vulgar hater of a dominant race, but that they are the utterances of a man of broad views and generous sympathies, intensely sensitive to oppression and wrong, filled with a passionate love of his countrymen and a desire to help them to nobler and higher national and social life

Of late years Shishir Kumar Ghose has withdrawn himself from the hurly-burly of political life, and from active participation in the editorship of his paper, which has been taken over by his brother, Motilal Ghose, who does his difficult work with conspicuous ability He has retired to his native village where his time is largely spent in that religious contemplative life, which it is the constant desire of every pious and devout Hindu to attain In this quiet and restful country-life, his time is spent mainly in the study of his favourite hero, Sree Gouranga, the renowned Prophet of Nadia, whom he looks upon with veneration as a great Messiah It is Shishir Kumar Ghose's ambition to be the interpreter of Sree Gauranga, not only to men of his own faith, but to devout students of western religion, believing that Jesus of Nazareth is equally a Messiah and that in the mastery of the teaching of both these God sent messengers, lies the solution of the unity of the world s faith, and the only successful check to that materialism and agnosticism,

bred by western culture, which, to his view, threatens to overwhelm all faith in a Supreme Creator and Saviour of mankind

It is not possible to be long in the company of this remarkable man, without realizing that he lives and moves on higher planes than his fellows, or without being profoundly touched by his simple and guileless nature, and his intense reverence for Almighty God, in whom he tries to live, to move and have his very being No man of other faith than my own brings home to me, like Shishir Kumar Ghose, the strength and truth of Paul's sermon at Athens on the altar, inscribed " to the unknown God ", in which he declared that " God giveth to all life and breath and all things, and hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on the face of the earth that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us "

II OBITUARY

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 12, 1911

Babu Shishir Kumar died the death which is coveted by Hindu saints He had no doubt been ailing, more or less, during the last two years from the effects of insomnia and dyspepsia, but he was always cheerful Nay, during his long illness not only did he write another big book which is in the course of printing, but edited his *Hindu Spiritual Magazine* in a way which has already created a reputation of its own, not only in India but also in England and America As Mr W S Caine in his short life of the deceased says "one of his own favourite sayings was 'time is the best gift of God to man'" As a fact, he rarely wasted a minute of his time Either he was in communion with his Maker or busy writing something for the benefit of mankind, even when he appeared to be in agony in consequence of an attack of the maladies from which he suffered That was the sort of life he led since his boyhood

Under the electric treatment of Dr P N Nundy he had apparently been regaining his health since the last three months About a week ago he got a cold and a little fever, which prevented him from going out for his daily drive While confined to his bed, he talked about spiritual matters with his friends Four days ago he told us, "never did I realize the presence of God so vividly as I do now" In the preceding evening of the day he breathed his last, he talked and talked about the beauty and love of the Father of all nations and was so powerfully moved that he fell into a state of ecstasy in which he often fell of late He remarked that he felt as if he were free from all disease and added that possibly it was God's wish that he should yet work for sometime in this world

The following morning his medical attendants found no trace of fever in his pulse He himself looked cheerful and said that he felt exceedingly well He bathed and took his breakfast with relish Indeed, he observed in a jocular tone that his appetite had again returned Some ten minutes before 2 p m , he was drowsy and expressed a desire to go to sleep He reclined on his high pillows, with half closed eyes, which he never opened again! His attendants found something unnatural in his breathing, sought to awaken him, and found that his life was ebbing out There was no restlessness no coolness of the feet or the hands, no rattling sound in the throat, no fixedness

of the eyes, not one of those disagreeable and painful signs of struggles, which usually precede death Two or three gasps, and his great soul passed away easily and quietly in five minutes at the most! A photo of the body was taken, and it shows how calm and serene he was when he had to fly from the cage in which he had been so long shut up

To the younger generation of our people, Babu Shishir Kumar is known more as a great spiritual teacher than a political character This is very natural, for, latterly he had practically eschewed politics and ascended a sphere of life,—where politics and other mundane affairs were mere playthings There is scarcely a Hindu family in Bengal which has not got his six volumes of *Amiya Nimai Charit* or the Life of the Nadia *Avatar*, Chaitanya, and these volumes are regarded by millions of Bengalees, educated and uneducated, as the repository of great spiritual truths that show the way to the highest heaven His life of the saint Thakur Narottum is another soul enthralling book,—which has scarcely its equal in Bengali literature *But, perhaps his greatest work is* Kalachand Gita *a poem of exquisite beauty and elegance, in which the philosophy of true religion has been developed in a way to which the followers of no religious faith can take any exception* His two volumes of *Lord Gouranga*, or the salvation for all, in English, elicited high eulogium from many well known English and American ladies and gentlemen who are competent to pass an opinion on the subject All these works show that, not only was Babu Shishir Kumar an intellectual giant, but he possessed a highly original and spiritualized mind

But though he sought to give up politics in his latter days he could not outgrow his love for his country When the Japanese author, Mr Okakma, came here, he was so impressed with the conversation of Babu Shishir Kumar that he told many people that he had not seen his like among the Bengali leaders he had come across Mr Ramsay MacDonald correctly described the position of Babu Shishir Kumar in these words in his book, *The Awakening of India* "He had withdrawn from the world and he is in sorrow because the plaintive voice of India will intrude upon his meditations"

The *Statesman*, January 11, 1911

We regret to announce the death of Mr Shishir Kumar Ghose (elder brother of Mr Motilal Ghose), founder and for so many years Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, who passed away yesterday afternoon at the age of seventy-one He retired some ten years ago from the active control of the paper and was leading the life of a religious recluse In his retirement he published many books on the Vaishnava religion both in English and Bengalee and edited the *Spiritual Magazine* He was identified with all political movements in the past decade and took a leading part in the inauguration of local self government during Lord Ripon's viceroyalty

The *Indian Daily News*, January 1911

We regret to announce the death of Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose on Tuesday evening at the age of seventy one One of the founders and the first editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, he with his brother Motilal was the pioneer of daily Anglo Bengali journalism and continued his work for well-nigh half a century In the early days of the *Patrika* his efforts in establishing mutual understanding between the rulers and the ruled and inaugurating administrative reforms were appreciated by rulers like Lord Ripon and Sir Ashley Eden Latterly he retired from the active control of the *Patrika* and was leading the life of a Vaishnavite recluse He was an acknowledged authority on Vaishnavite literature and wrote a series of books on the life and teachings of Chaitanya of which *Lord Gouranga* is a well known work He subsequently started the *Hindu Spiritual Magazine*, a monthly publication devoted to spiritualism and psychic researches Shishir Kumar was born in the district of Jessore and made his own way in life He was a man of varied accomplishments and took great interest in the revival of Hindu music His death will be widely deplored in all parts of the country

The *Empire* (Special), January 11, 1911

Few Europeans who have come to India during the last 20 years ever saw that remarkable man Shishir Kumar Ghose, founder of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, who passed away yesterday at the age of 71 Shishir Babu worked pretty nearly to the last, but he had been a confirmed invalid for many years, and had retired altogether from public life Upon the few people who came in contact with him, however, he always made an ineffaceable impression His face, clean shaven and ascetic, with its crown of thick white hair, was stamped with the "peace which passeth all understanding" He looked like a mediaeval saint, and his smile was a benediction He took a keen and lively interest in current affairs especially upon the political and economic side and it is not difficult to guess the source from which the shrewd and somewhat cynical comments of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* drew their inspiration A contemporary claims for him that he was the father of technical education in Bengal, and he was at all times a fearless and damaging critic of the administration But it may truly be said that his journalistic career was for him a mere side-issue His real interests lay in spiritual things His book *Lord Gouranga*, or salvation for all is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable books which ever saw the light in India, as it is certainly the most fascinating study ever given to the world of the great Chaitanya He was a convinced spiritualist, and to the day of his death edited a spiritual magazine Altogether he was much more taken up with the next life than with this one The adoration with which he was regarded by the members of his family, and particularly by his younger brother, Moti Babu, one of the most cynical and pessimistic journalists in India, was the most eloquent tribute to his worth

Dr S K Mullick at the memorial meeting held in the Town Hall, Calcutta, on 23rd March 1911 I had no idea of the strength of the paper (*Patrika*) until one day I happened to be in the India Office in London There were several papers on the table and on asking the man in charge for the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, I was told that it was with the then Under Secretary of State for India, Lord Onslow I was further told that that was the only Indian paper to which Lord Onslow subscribed as he found in that paper a great deal which helped him in solving the Indian political problems of the day The *Patrika* sometimes said this official, wrote rather strongly but it always conveyed the Indian point of view clearly and emphatically I may safely say that a considerable part of the Legislation of the India Office has been largely tinctured by the views of the great organ

Many years ago I happened to be the guest of the late Sir Richard Temple at his beautiful country seat in Worcester and I remember vividly one night after dinner Sir Richard's eulogium of Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose He was talking on men and things of his time in India, and although Shishir Babu had opposed Sir Richard on several occasions, yet no man regarded him with greater respect than this large minded English Governor It is common knowledge to you, gentlemen, that local self government owes much to Shishir Babu's influence over Sir Richard Temple who was then our Lieutenant Governor

In course of a letter addressed to the Maharaja of Darbhanga who presided over the memorial meeting at Town Hall, Babu Sarada Charan Mitter, an Ex-Judge of the Calcutta High Court wrote I first came in contact with Babu Shishir Kumar in 1874 His magnetic influence attracted me as soon as I ceased to be a college student Sir John Campbell was then at the head of the local administration He was a 'Tiberias', as the *Indian Observer* called him, and Babu Kristo Das Pal, the able Editor of the *Hindu Patriot* and Babu Shishir Kumar, the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had friction with him, a friction unavoidable by independent journalists They were both denounced in the Bengal Administration Report, but both were within their rights in their denunciation Selfishness and loss of independence from nervousness were no parts of their nature Babu Shishir Kumar had in addition in a strong degree devotion to God which has always been a protection against nervous fear

The period of Babu Shishir Kumar's life which was most replete with interest to me as a citizen of Calcutta was when the agitation for the introduction of the elective principle of representation in the Municipal Corporation of Calcutta was going on Sir Richard Temple was then the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal The elective principle was opposed either wholly or partially by an influential portion of the public press but the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was a powerful advocate Sir Richard Temple was himself a friend and admirer of Babu Shishir Kumar, and Babu Shishir Kumar went beyond the duties of a mere journalist and took ample but legitimate advantage of

the confidence Sir Richard had in him I saw them on several occasions conferring on the Corporation Bill then pending in the Bengal Council

The Hon'ble Mr Bhupendra Nath Basu, addressing the Town Hall meeting, said I had known Shishir Kumar Ghose ever since the time that I could form an idea of what was going on around me From the days of Sir George Campbell, when the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* published its famous cartoon of Deputy Magistrates and their chief it has always held a warm place in the heart of the people It was pre-eminently the people's organ and Shishir Kumar was the people s man Deeply religious and spiritual, earnestly patriotic and keenly alive to the many drawbacks under which our people laboured, he never spoke or wrote without touching some chord which vibrated in sympathy

As other speakers have said he rose from very humble beginnings through the uplifting force of genius and he placed the gift that God had given him entirely at the service of his people

The official atmosphere has cleared considerably now, but it was not so always, not so even until lately, and the man who ventured to doubt the wisdom of an official measure was at once treated as a dangerous fanatic, and this was the lot of Shishir Kumar, for, in upholding the rights of the people, he had often to contend against the views of the officials, who did not like his deep incisions into all the sore points of the administration Shishir Kumar's society was eagerly sought for by many rulers of the country and if he had chosen to follow the less strenuous path, he would have risen to the highest summit that that path leads to But manfully he resisted the temptation and he chose the more difficult and to us the more dangerous path, and in doing so he so conducted himself that he secured the affection of his countrymen and the esteem of the officials Our present ruler, writing only the other day to a friend of mine after the death of Shishir Kumar, says that "his name was well known and always carried with it the feeling of high respect As a public man even though he had long lived in retirement, he always enjoyed high esteem" This is high testimony from a gentleman in the position and distinction of the present ruler of Bengal It was Shishir Kumar who secured, through his influence with Sir Richard Temple, the Municipal Self Government for Calcutta and it was he who secured through his incessant criticism the benefits to the toiling millions of Bengal of the cess they paid

In course of his address at the memorial meeting, Sir Gurudas Banerjee said As a prominent political leader Shishir Kumar's great merit lay in his being the first to perceive that the real political progress of the country consisted in the masses being awakened to a due sense of their political rights and duties This was only an anticipation of his subsequent spiritual development He felt for all but most for those who wanted his sympathy more His democratic leaning was not the result of any ill will towards the

aristocracy but was the outcome of enthusiastic goodwill for the masses That is why notwithstanding his pronounced democratic predilections, the leading members of the aristocracy were his sincere admirers and fast friends His views differed from those of his contemporaries but that was perhaps because he was much in advance of his time and saw forecast of the future of which others had not yet caught any glimpse

As a journalist the pungency of his criticism of public men and measures was one distinctive feature of his writings He wrote strongly because he felt strongly for the wrongs For the time being the wrongs carried him away But bitterness was no part of his writings His very strength sometimes constituted his weakness and his writings were sometimes considered to be bitter But they had always the saving grace of humour and bitterness was as far from his nature as anything could be He has been rightly described as the master of journalism in India You are told that his style of writing was somewhat quaint, but I think it was his originality His style of writing was not borrowed from any one but was peculiarly his own Originality in this as in most other matters was his special merit

Hon'ble Mr G K Gokhale said at the same meeting

I first met Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose ten years ago and the impression which he then made on me remains with me today It is true that even before meeting him I had formed a very high idea of him because I had heard a great deal about him from my master, the late Mr Ranade, who always spoke of Shishir Kumar in terms of great admiration and affection, but it was not till I actually met him that I realized what a wonderfully interesting and inspiring personality he was His patriotism made him a restless and incessant worker in the service of his country and yet behind it all was a deep peace born of true spirituality Often in the midst of his strenuous argument when he was emphasizing his point of view with all the energy of his powerful mind, he would suddenly break into a gentle smile and change the subject with some affectionate enquiry of a personal nature, thus giving us a glimpse of the peace that lay underneath his restlessness, and showing that in the midst of the din and turmoil of practical life he could when he chose, withdraw himself into an inner sanctuary to be alone with his Maker I am sure that when the history of these times comes to be written Shishir Kumar will occupy a foremost place amongst the makers of modern India

Mr A J F Blair, Editor of the *Empire*, said as follows Every country has its saints and warriors but as a rule the saints are not warriors and the warriors are not saints It was part of the greatness of Shishir Kumar Ghose that he combined in his own personality those apparently irreconcilable elements As a warrior he did not battle with his sword, but he and his distinguished brother, Motilal, forged for themselves even a mightier weapon which

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they wielded together for forty years with results that are written deep in the history of Bengal . . Gentlemen, it is given to few of us to please everybody — least of all to a great controversial journalist in a country which is still a stranger to the spirit of compromise Shishir Kumar Ghose fought with the button off his foil, and never touched his adversary without drawing blood Such a man inevitably roused bitter opposition and hosts of critics, detractors and enemies I myself never professed to approve of everything he said and did But there were two things about him which I venture to assert his bitterest enemy never dared to call in question The first was the absolute integrity of his motives The second was the consummate craftsmanship of his journalistic method No journalist could help admiring such a master of satiric expression

Shishir Kumar's contribution to the religious and spiritual thought of this age constitutes his most enduring fame Speaking personally — and I feel sure that I speak for many of my fellow-countrymen — it was in that wonderful book *Lord Gouranga* that I obtained my first startled glimpse into the spiritual depths of the Hindu mind From the moment of that revelation I came to regard its author in the light of a spiritual Guru; and although many years intervened between my introduction to the book and my introduction to the man, when I did meet him in the flesh, and fell under the charm of his personality, I felt that here was a teacher whom I had known intimately ever since I came to these shores

In the course of an article contributed to the *Hindu Spiritual Magazine* Roy Jatindra Nath Chowdhury, M A, B L, of Barnagore, wrote as follows His political writings and opinions were, as is the case with some of our leaders, not a matter of academical interest only When he began his political career, he lived amongst the village men, felt with them and thus thoroughly acquainted himself with the modes of their life and their wants His politics was not therefore bookish simply In all his political methods, what he wanted to impress upon the Government and to bring before the people was exactly that which was based upon a genuine feeling for the country Before him, there was practically no political agitation amongst the people in the country; by founding the Indian League, he brought political education at the door of our countrymen of all classes It was chiefly after the establishment of the Indian League and through its instrumentality that our countrymen, as a whole, began to realize their political situation and their political rights and duties In fact it was due to the efforts of Shishir Babu in organizing this political association that the interest of our countrymen was aroused for the amelioration of the political condition of our country. The forces we now see at work in the diverse fields of our activity, may be traced to the labours of a few men, amongst whom Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose was prominent.

When Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose began his Calcutta life, he had to fight against odds and it was a man of his culture, and culture only, that could

rise above those odds and could chalk out a position from which it was possible for him to guide and educate our countrymen in matters political. As a journalist, he worked with an independence and honesty of purpose that should be an example for all time. He was no respecter of persons, he never spared even his friends when he found them wanting. Babu Shishir Kumar was always ready to criticize ruthlessly oppression and injustice whenever and wherever they were found, and in doing so, he made no reservation for those who were high in position when public question was concerned. There was a fund of wit and humour, all his own, in his writings, which even the men against whom they were employed could not but enjoy. For mastery of facts in all their details and for plain but pointed statements of them, tempered with good humour and sarcastic wits when necessary, Shishir Babu's political writings had few equals and no superiors.

The cause of political advancement in this country found in him an able and active champion; it was due to his labours mainly that the ratepayers of Calcutta enjoy the benefit of self-government in the administration of the Calcutta Municipality. His writings were a terror to the wrong-doing officials as well as to the erring people of this country. His sense of justice and his courage of conviction were so strong that he vehemently opposed the levying of the Road Cess which he rightly considered to be a modification of the Permanent Settlement while some of the journals advocating the cause of the Bengal zemindars supported it. In the matter of the levying of the Income Tax he had to part with many of his intimate friends while he supported the tax because he considered it to be reasonable. Passing for the moment the consideration of the merit or otherwise of those questions, nobody can deny that Babu Shishir Kumar Ghose's courage of conviction on those and similar occasions was something which cannot be too highly praised.

* * *

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, presiding over the sixth death anniversary meeting on the 29th December 1917:

We have all heard a number of incidents relating to the life of one whose memory we have come here to commemorate today. As for myself, I want to add only a few words to what has already been said. I must say first that I had the pleasure and honour of being personally acquainted with Shishir Babu. I have learnt many lessons sitting at his feet. I revered him as my father and I venture again to say that he, in return, loved me as his son. I can call to mind many an interview that I had with him at the *Patrika* office some of which lasted for hours. I have distinct recollections of what he told me of his experiences as a journalist with tears in his eyes and sympathy in his words. I then requested him, I remember now, to put down those incidents, at least to leave notes, in writing, so that they might serve the future historian of the country or even the writer of his life.

To me, Shishir Babu figures as the pioneer of journalists in this country. After the Mutiny, when he was only 15 years of age, came the establishment

of the British Bureaucracy in this country, — it was a despotic rule and the country wanted a man who would cope with their devices, — who would see the inner meaning of their devices — who was courageous enough to meet them bold and honest enough to expose them, and take defeat calmly and coolly in order to resuscitate for future strength Such was Shishir Kumar Ghosh The *Patrika* is the manifestation of the spirit of which he was full, — nobody may talk of the *Patrika* without being reminded of Shishir Kumar Ghosh At this time a man was required with a feeling heart to realize the position of the masses who were then governed by a despotic rule, — one who must have sympathy with the people who were unjustly treated and did not know what to do but only looked up to heaven for help The people were dumb Bureaucracy had full power The Mutiny had just been over and British rule had been firmly established in the land At such a time a man was required to steer the national ship to a safe harbour constitutionally and legally, — a man of courage a man who could see through the actions of the bureaucracy, — actions which are calculated to bear fruit in the distant future

It is a very difficult task now to criticize the Government, — it was more so in those days and not only biting sarcasm but great resourcefulness, great courage, great insight and large sympathy was required to make honest journalism a success in the land Shishir Kumar had these qualities in abundance The authorities feared him They could not raise their finger to crush him You have just now heard the story of Sir Ashley Eden who wanted to strike at him but could not What was it due to? It was not due to legal or any other protection — it was due to the character of the man which was his only protection Sir Ashley feared not so much the writing of the man but the character of the man who would persist on writing such things so long as the injustice was not removed

In Shishir Kumar we had a man who would not care for honour or favour but would stand boldly by his guns until success was attained Even a strong man at times is not able to do much, for strength is to be joined with prudence, prudence is to be coupled with foresight, — both with courage and keenness of perception, which is granted only to a few people in the world In Shishir Kumar all these qualities were combined Such a man I had the honour and the pleasure of knowing

Journalism, — independent and free journalism, — was not an easy task those days, — 60 years ago, when many of you were charmed by Government service You looked upon such a man as rather eccentric, — he might be independent, might be honest, but certainly not worldly He had calmly to bear the reproaches of friends for having refused Government favours and other things that make life happy and easy He stood alone and his conscience was his stand He thought that he had a message to give to the world, — he thought that he had a duty to do and he did it unflinchingly That was the man who led Bengal in the last decades of the nineteenth century I am glad to say that these traditions of the paper are being faithfully maintained to this day I myself have something to do with

journalism and when I take a survey of the papers that have been carried on for two generations with the same policy and with the same spirit — I can point to one paper and that is the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* I had a talk on that subject with my friend Babu Motilal Ghosh I asked him how was it that he could copy his brother so exactly in language style and sentiment and he told me that he had studied his brother and nothing else and hence he had been able to maintain the spirit of the paper

These high ideals are out of the reach of common people and the common people judge these men by their own standards and attribute to them motives which are foreign to them Shishir Babu had also to face this and he did the work which can truly be called the work of an angel He saw that the service of humanity was a stepping stone to the service of God When he gave up owing to physical feebleness his work at the *Patrika* office he devoted his time to the service of God with the same enthusiasm and fervour with which he did service to the people Such was the man we have lost I am sorry I am not an adept in character sketching but if I have given you certain prominent characteristics of his life I think I have done enough Such a man is rare to find You have his life written and from it you may know the story of his life, but underneath all this do not fail to find out and properly value the man who had made journalism what it is in India

I know with what enthusiasm and eagerness the *Patrika* was awaited in my province every week forty years ago I know how people were delighted to read his sarcasm, his pithy and critical notes written in his racy style simple, but at the same time effective How people longed to see the paper on the day it was due by post how people enjoyed it —I know it personally You in Bengal cannot know what we felt and thought in the Maharashtra Strange stories circulated about these brothers in my province People used to say that Shishir Babu was writing with one foot in jail and the other brother was waiting simply to see when the elder is sent to jail There were stories like that, and if they do not correspond with facts they at least illustrate the feeling and the rever ence with which the paper was read in my part of the country They show how the man was appreciated They were really delighted to see his writings but very few had the courage to quote those remarks before others —they enjoyed them in secret

I may further tell you that when we started our paper in vernacular, we tried to follow the editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* This was the time when one had to teach the people how to criticize the bureaucracy and at the same time keep oneself safe bodily at least if not pecuniarily That was the idea fully developed by Shishir Kumar in those days of journalism Bureaucracy is always anxious to conciliate its critics not by mending its way but by offering bribes to them and the dignity of Shishir Kumar lay not so much in his writings as in the courage which he showed at a critical time when favours were offered to him and he rejected them with contempt Such a man he was

Shishir Kumar was a true political saint and I regret as much as you do that that kind of character is getting rare in these days, as it is bound to be by

APPENDIX II

FACSIMILE OF LETTERS

(1)

(Vide page No. 110 for correct reading)

the demoralization of the despotic government We thank God that we had such a man in the early years of journalism in India He was a hero in the true sense of the word He did not see his aspirations fulfilled It might be ful filled in a generation or two or more but we cannot forget that it was he who laid the foundation Such a man deserved to be respected not only during his life but for all time to come I wish you to study his life,— to look not to his failings but to his great achievements — to draw inspiration from him and follow in his footsteps as far as it is possible for you to do

Dr Sir Rash Behari Ghose, Kt in writing his Foreword to *Pictures of Indian Life* (published by Ganesh & Co, Madras) in December, 1917

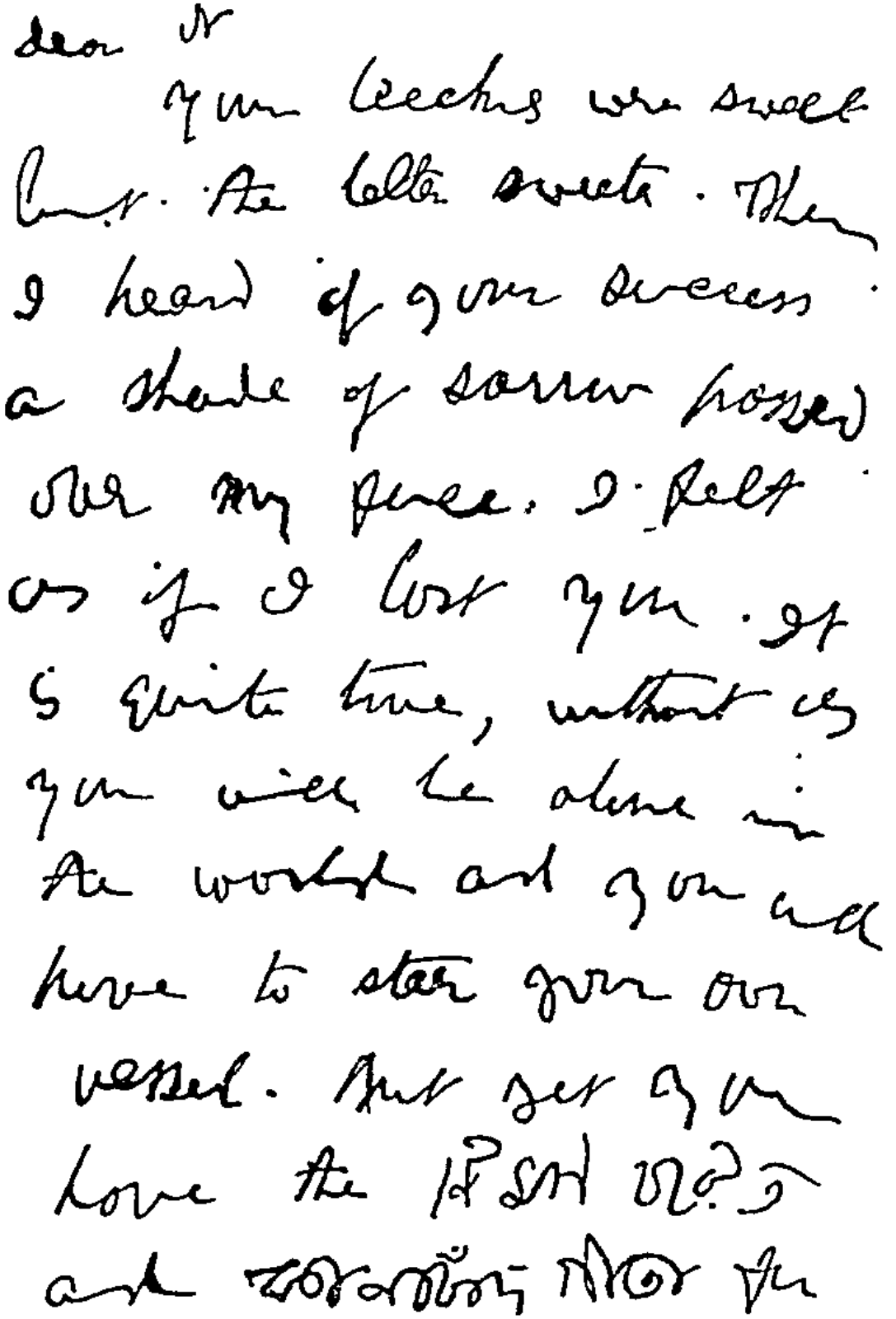
He was a man of intense spiritual fervour and his religious works which have enjoyed a wide circulation show him perhaps at his best Of Babu Shishir Kumar it may be truly said that he broke no promise, served no private end, gained no title and lost no friends

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the demoralization of the despotic government We thank God that we had such a man in the early years of journalism in India He was a hero in the true sense of the word He did not see his aspirations fulfilled It might be fulfilled in a generation or two or more but we cannot forget that it was he who laid the foundation Such a man deserved to be respected not only during his life but for all time to come I wish you to study his life — to look not to his failings but to his great achievements — to draw inspiration from him and follow in his footsteps as far as it is possible for you to do

Dr Sir Rash Behari Ghose, Kt in writing his Foreword to *Pictures of Indian Life* (published by Ganesh & Co, Madras) in December, 1917

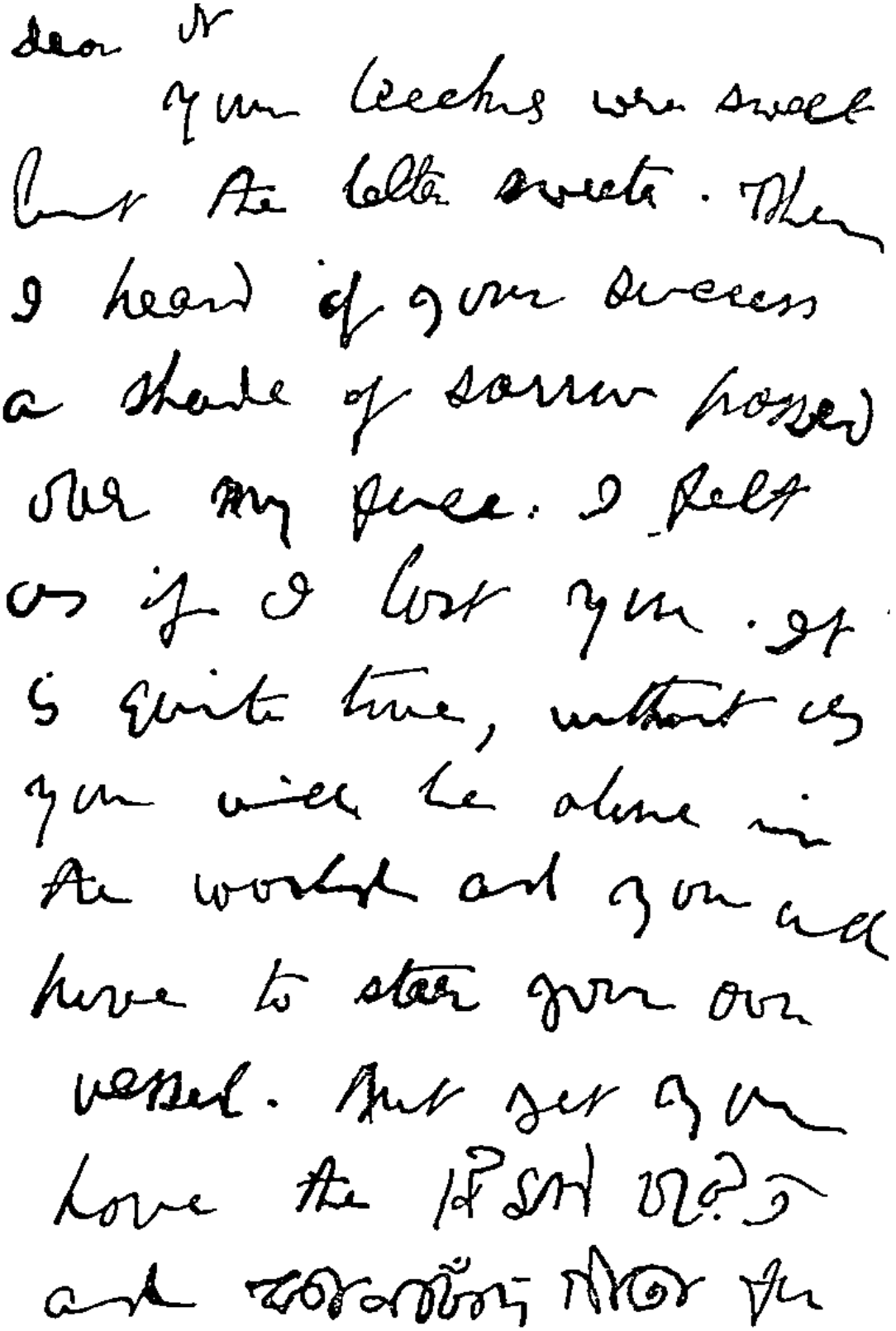
He was a man of intense spiritual fervour and his religious works which have enjoyed a wide circulation show him perhaps at his best Of Babu Shishir Kumar it may be truly said that he broke no promise, served no private end, gained no title and lost no friends

APPENDIX II

FACSIMILE OF LETTERS

(1)

(Vide page No 110 for correct reading)



your companions. In them
you will find us
Heroes, my revered teacher
once told me, [a philosopher] who I know
of the true. or is this:
What one has not he
will not have.'
You have for the seed
and you will never
lose it. or is bound
to germinate either
now or some time
after. You destroy

will no doubt stand in
your way, they are so
very Cowardly and base by
how my affections is upon
you and so as a Cause
for my Separating from
you. I have hopes that
he and we shall by
my departure and
keeping you in our
Native Climate be

the Order is being
cut if book
Revert to Conference
if no. the yrs
affl
Shishir

(2)
(*Vide page No 110*)

you must know the
universal law of
attraction holds good

both for the material
and spiritual
world. In the material
world its force is
called attraction and
the centre is the sun.
In the spiritual world
the attraction is called
love and the centre
is the Spiritual
Sun that is God.
To make the thing short
it is love which is the
grand force in

the spiritual world.
To cultivate this spirit
is the chief aim of
our earthly life. God
help us that we
may not lose sight
of the love self
sacrifice is to which
we are called to love others.
This is our example
& have we not called
to the world as
the members of His
family. Thank God

I am summoned by
loving heart - I have
a fond hope I am
one dead. I hope
May other son Nagendra
will in Time come
to fulfil my
teaching. There is yet
one desire - rooted deep
in my heart that do
you know what it is?
That sorrow burned
from the darkness

of . He is glad
to see her & wish
he were and to see
and good to all about
them as a consequence
with Lin and with Li
to love her and his
relation to all
mankind

affly.
Shishi

APPENDIX III

A REPERTORY TO IN QUEST OF BLISS

by

WANDERER

(*Vide page 153*)

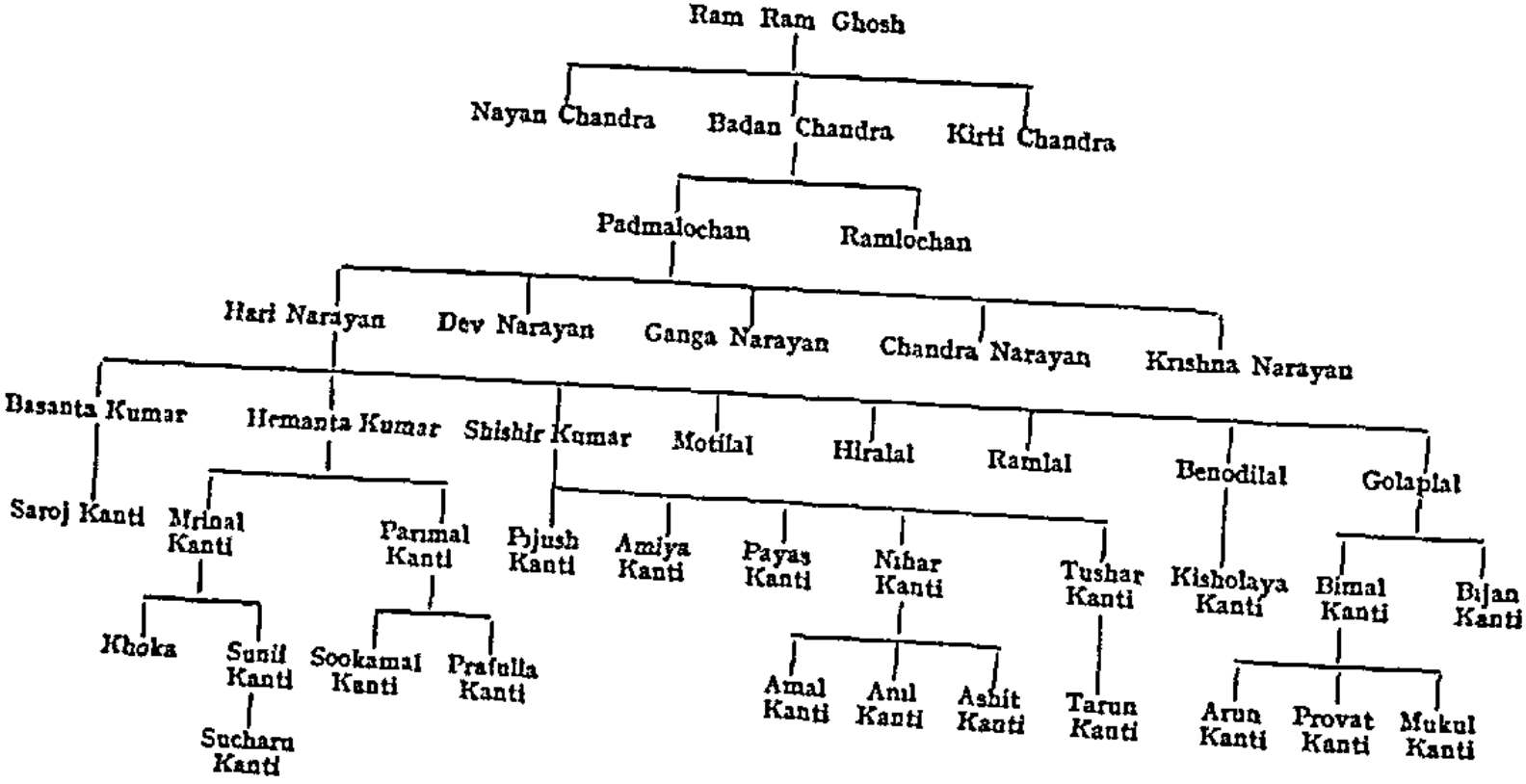
	PAGE
The dread of death	3
Meeting after death	3
"He is, He exists"	5
The pleasure in possessing powers	6
The tasting of power leads to greed	7
God kind as well as cruel?	8
God is human plus something	8
God the Father, God the Mother; sense of duality	9
Desires, and objects for their fulfilment	10
The desire to live	10
Proof of a world beyond	10
Proof of God's existence	10
Woman the teacher of love	13
Love for God and fear of Him distinguished	14
God the Artist	21
Apparent evils in the world	25
Beauty in apparently ugly things	25
The frolicking God	26
Purification of soul	27

Play of dolls 28
The unseen hand 29
God's game revealed 30
God's purposes, can a child know them? 31
Doubts and hopes . 32
Man's destiny 32
There is no ill in this world . 33
If God is kind as well as omnipotent, why He gives not pleasure only? 34
Defects in creation . 35
Separation and reunion . . 35
Death opens into a new life . . 36
Love cements and love grows . . 37
If mere man is not wantonly cruel, how can God be so? . . 38
Man lives forgetful on getting material comforts 39
God's duality 40
Daily dip in the Jamuna — the stream of devotion 44
God's 'name' the pass-word . . 45
At the feet of the Lord 46
Merits in being at His feet 48
Tussle between God and man 49
God's obedience to man's call 51
The God easily got is easily forgot 52
Ennui from too easy attainment 53
Role of tears 54
Why God makes Himself scarce 55
Bewildering paths to Divinity 57
Counting the beads 58
A passionate cry 59
Knowledge and wisdom 60
Goal of knowledge? 60
Insistent call and tears 61
A fleeting vision 62
Stealing of the heart 62
Intoxication 62
A message from the Lord 62
Armoured by God's presence 63
As thou seekest 64
As thou beest 64
Ecstasy 65
Devotion, the cleanser 66
A mental portrait 67

Why God s sorrows are not revealed 112
Idle vaunt of love 113
Why He is a loving God 114
Can He be fault finding? 116
Repasting with God 117
Rejection of bad fruits and the offering of good ones 117
As the offering so its return 117
Man blind to God s gifts and ignorant of their use 118
The birds and flowers proclaim His love 118
The lotus on the love filled lake 119
"I am thine and thou art mine 120
A grateful God 121
True love is watered by tears 122
Tears wash away sins 122
Boons and punishments 126
For man to love, like man He must be 129
The supreme Manifestation 130
The real boon to seek 131

APPENDIX IV

GENEALOGY OF GHOSH FAMILY



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